

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

# Usage guidelines

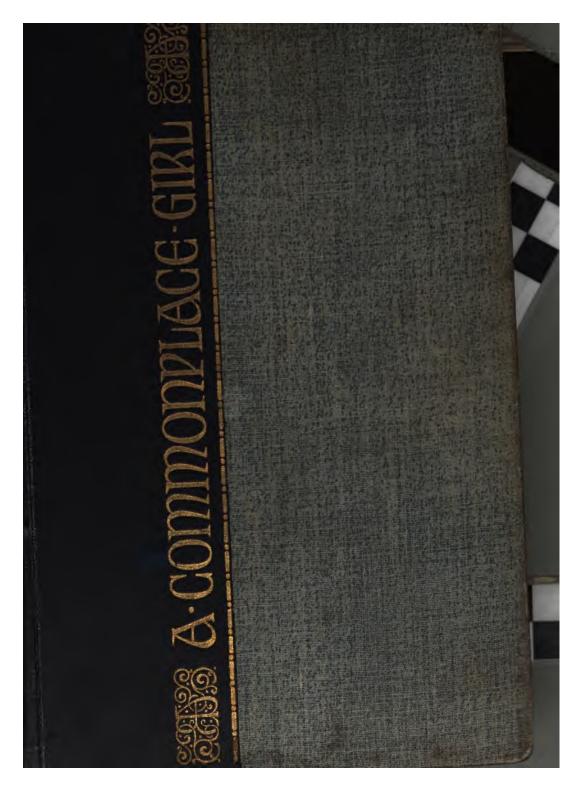
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/



To many from hand.

Yhas 1902

Sish



A COMMONPLACE GIRL



### AT ALL THE LIBRARIES.

MORTON VERLOST.

A MODERN CRUSADER.

AN ISLE IN THE WATER.

THE UNWRITTEN LAW.

THE VEIL OF LIBERTY.

POSTE RESTANTE.

THE GRASSHOPPERS. A JAPANESE MARRIAGE.

JOHN DARKER.

THE COMEDY OF CECILIA.

MARGUERITE BRYANT. SOPHIR F. F. VEITCH.

KATHARINE TYNAN.

DR. QUANTRILL'S EXPERIMENT. T. INGLIS.

BLANCHE LOFTUS TOTTENHAM.

Péronne.

C. Y. HARGREAVES.

Mrs. Andrew Dean. DOUGLAS SLADEN.

AUBREY LEE.

CAROLINE FOTHERGILL.

### Α

# COMMONPLACE GIRL

BY

# **BLANCHE ATKINSON**

AUTHOR OF

"THE WEB OF LIFE" "THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD"

"This world's no blot for us Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good"

LONDON ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK 1895

[All Rights Reserved]

ALG 3533

TO

MRS. TALBOT

IN REMEMBRANCE OF HAPPY DAYS SPENT

IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

AND AS

A SLIGHT TOKEN OF GRATEFUL AFFECTION

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED



# A COMMONPLACE GIRL

## CHAPTER I

A YOUNG man—evidently on the best of terms with life—and a girl—on whose fair face rested a cloud of half-repressed trouble—sauntered side by side through flower-scented fields, and talked together with the familiarity of tried friendship. It was the close of a perfect day in June; the hour of softly blending colours, and slowly fading lights, and the deepening of dreaming shadows, which, in the North of England, compensates by its rare loveliness for much unsatisfactory weather.

The bewitchment of it suddenly struck the young man, though he was not burdened by acute æsthetic susceptibilities.

"What a jolly evening, Judith!" he exclaimed.

"The sky, and the birds—and altogether. It's just

the kind of thing to make poets and painters tear their hair, and give up, isn't it? I wonder if they have anything better than this in America?"

"And I wonder how you can wonder. Of course not—in America, or anywhere else. Nowhere in the world can be so lovely! Besides, in America you will always be frozen to death by cold, or broiled alive by heat, or swept away by a tornado, or eaten up by flies—they do nothing in moderation. How anyone can want to go to America "—

He interrupted her with a peal of laughter, and Judith, blinking away a tear, laughed also. But as they reached the brow of the hill, and came in sight of Ernthwaite, the spell of the beauty of the place and hour fell upon them-hushed his careless laugh, and checked her impulsive speech. The path passed through fields of flowery meadow grass, ripe for mowing, sprinkled with the white and gold and purple of large daisies, and tall buttercups, and nodding heads of burnet. All the summer wealth of flowers clustered at their feet along the borders of the path — the starry stitchwort, the deep pink campion in its brown sheath, the blue speedwell, the wild pansy—purple and yellow. The clumps of low wood all about the valley were freshly green, and the thrushes sang in a rapture of joy over the lovely world; the sweet twilight lingered as though the day had been too beautiful to end; the crimson bars in

the western sky faded slowly. But because the day had been warm, the sun had drawn moisture from the earth, and a faint mist floated along the hills, and veiled the blue distance, where a chain of mountains rose beyond the grey lake.

His name was Geoffrey Fielding, and his father was vicar of the village of Ernthwaite—those few roofs clustering about the grey church tower in the fold of the hills.

Her name was Judith Mordaunt, and this had been her home also since childhood.

Presently the path became so narrow that Judith went first, letting her hand ripple the long grass that encroached upon the path, and now and then plucking a scarlet poppy or ox-eye daisy; but she was not thinking of poppies or daisies, and when she came to a stone wall dividing one field from the next, instead of crossing by the steps in it, she leaned her arms on the coping and gazed wistfully before her. As Geoffrey came and stood beside her, a shade of regret touched his boyish face. The chimneys of the Vicarage rose among the sycamores to the right of the church, and wherever there was a clearing in the woods, the blue slate roof of a cottage, or the buildings of a farmstead, filled the gap. He could tell the name and circumstance of every inhabitant. sides the low woods crept up and down the hills, ending in dark spires of fir against the pale evening

sky; only in one place, where the valley opened, a glimpse of the lake shimmered among the dusky green, and far-off purple peaks were dimly traced above white mist against a saffron sky.

"It is a sleepy little place," Geoffrey said. "But now that I'm going to make tracks for foreign parts, of course I begin to find that I've a kind of love for the old home. I wonder if I shall ever see it again?"

"You have promised your father to come back in two years," Judith said, looking up quickly.

"Yes, I believe I said something of the sort, and I will if I can. But, you know, when a man is knocking about the world, all sorts of things may happen, and"—

"Things may happen anywhere," she broke in; but if you live, you can always keep a promise."

He laughed lightly. "I've not taken a solemn vow and covenant to come back in two years, Miss Judith; I am not going to ruin my prospects—if I have any by that time—because I must run back to keep a half promise to see the old man! If I can, conveniently, I will. If not"—

"Such a promise as that is better not made at all," the girl said. "I—everyone—hates to be taken in. You don't mean to come back; you are only saying it to pacify your father."

"Oh yes, I mean to come back, right enough. But

don't you see? a fellow doesn't always do what he means to do, and it would be sheer folly to throw up a good thing merely for the sake of saying 'How do?' to my father."

"What do you mean by 'a good thing'? You are only going with your friend to amuse yourself."

"Come now, that's not quite fair," he said, with perfect good temper. "I am going to look out for a paying business of some kind, and settle to it, if I'm lucky enough to get the chance. And if I amuse myself meanwhile, is there any harm in that? You need not be hard upon me, my last evening! It's bad enough to leave you all"—

"Oh, hush! hush!" Judith cried, with a little bitter laugh. "Don't pretend that you are sorry. You were always honest—at least. I think it is always those who are left who are sorry—your father, and all of us."

"You are thinking of the Tysons' tea-parties at Christmas—eleven ladies and four men. Yes, you will miss me a little then. But I like to be missed, and when I come back, I shall be what Mrs. Tyson calls 'quite an acquisition.'"

Judith smiled as she met his laughing eyes, but her lips quivered, and she turned her face away, and said in a lower tone, "It is your father, Geoffrey. You are all he has, and two years is a long time. Try to come back, for his sake, and settle near him."

He struck at the wall with his stick impatiently. "How can I settle near him, Judith? You know that I can't take Orders, as he wished, and come and be his curate, and have all you girls in love with me, though I daresay it would be very jolly. I'm not an out-and-out Agnostic, perhaps, because I don't care enough about it to decide who's right and who's wrong. But I'm one of your 'Never mind your creed so long as you behave decently' fellows, and I'm too honest, as you allow, to commence curate on that theory."

"There are other things to do at home, surely. Other young men find work in England—why cannot you? If you wished, it would be easy enough." She spoke with quiet conviction, and, crossing the steps in the wall, walked slowly on, still speaking. "Of course it won't make any difference now. You mean to go. But, Geoffrey, do let me say this! You will be sorry some day, if you stay away, and turn your back upon a duty, just for your own pleasure, if your father should come to need you. I don't believe that getting one's own way is always best. You like the fun of it now, but it may hurt afterwards."

"What nonsense you are talking!" he said.
"What could I do for my father, if I stayed? You know as well as I do that he is wrapped up in his books, and that he can't be made to see that he's

wasting his strength for a shadow; and that he wants no company, neither mine nor anybody's. As for duty—my duty is to try to make some provision for him. I've two hundred a year—and now I am master of it, isn't it the best thing I can do to find an opening for myself—buy a cattle ranch or something; and then, when the poor old dad is obliged to resign, and is up to the neck in debt to his publisher, I can carry him off, and get him all the books he wants, and let him have a comfortable old age. He isn't fit for his work here now—anyone can see it. That's what I want to do—and yet here you are preaching to me as if I were a regular prodigal."

She shook her head, and would not look at him. Geoffrey went on. "Don't you see what a splendid chance this is for me? Middleton has got first-rate introductions, and we shall knock round together, and see something of life. And I shall be on the lookout, all the time, for something to turn to. It's not going to be all play. And in a year or two, or more, I'll come back for the old man, and carry him off, and he won't know whether he is in Westmoreland or Kamschatka, if he has his big books about him." Then he paused, and looked at his companion. As she did not speak, he slipped his hand through her arm and said, "This is our last walk, Judith. Don't let us quarrel to-night!"

There was a tremble in the girl's voice as she said,

"It is Mr. Fielding I am thinking of, Geoffrey. You know I don't mean to be unkind."

"No, you were never unkind, Judith, all the years we've been friends. And you'll believe I mean it for the best, won't you? And you and Mrs. Sylvestre and Dr. Tyson will look after my father, I know, better than I could. And, honestly, I do want to see the world. Every man wants to see the world. Existence stagnates here. I want to be face to face with Life, where it is fresh and untamed. I want to see the human animal with his native instincts in free play. Here they are all smoothed out of him by centuries of civilisation and the grinding wheels of use and wont. We are all commonplace and uninteresting."

"That sounds very fine, but it's all nonsense, Geoffrey. Here, in our own village, we have our tragedies and interests just as much as elsewhere. Why, you silly boy, don't people marry and die here? What can they do more?'

"You may call me 'a silly boy' if you like, my dear girl, but I am twenty-one, and you are only eighteen, and, of course, you can't understand. I want to see different types of men and women—different phases of life. I want to meet famous men—the men who make history; and beautiful women—the women one reads about, whose eyes set men's hearts on fire. Everything here is tame and respectable."

"Yes," Judith said stiffly; "even such a beautiful woman as Mrs. Sylvestre has the drawback of being respectable."

Geoffrey laughed. "I suppose girls like everything humdrum and respectable. They don't feel like this."

"If they did, they might as well kill themselves at once," she retorted, with heat. "Girls are afraid of real, naked life; they are obliged to dress it up in respectable clothes. But it is here all the same, even in Ernthwaite, and I've seen it. Mrs. Sylvestre says that girls must be commonplace if they are to be happy, whether you like them or not."

"I like all nice girls, especially my old Judith. You will look after Dad for me while I am away, won't you?"

"You know I will do what I can."

His hand clasped hers and held it as they went slowly on in the gathering dusk.

"I am very sorry to go, really," he said, more gravely than before; "but honestly, I did not see what to do. Perhaps I promised Middleton too hastily, and without thinking it over enough. But it is too late to draw back now, and I do believe it is the best thing I can do. Only, I don't want you to think me beastly selfish. I'm not very resolute, and if I had talked to you first, I daresay I should have thrown it up. You know I usually do things first,

and question whether they are wise afterwards. But there's nothing like seeing the world for giving a man resolution and stability."

"That seems to me an absurd maxim," Judith said, with the blunt directness which characterised her. "I don't see how you are to pick up virtues on your travels any more than here. And you must be resolute, Geoffrey! A man is not worth much without that. And you must come back in two years to see your father. Perhaps you will bring us a famous man or two to stare at; or, better still, be one yourself. Or you will have caught one of your beautiful wild women, and will bring her here to try whether the hearts of country clowns can be set on fire."

" Now you are laughing at me, Judith."

"Well, may I not laugh? Do you want me to cry because you are going away? Good-night. This is my way, and that is yours."

"I am coming to the Hall with you."

"No, you are not. I want to go on alone."

The field path branched where they stood; one track turning to the left through the woods to the Hall, the other continuing downwards to the village. Lights had begun to twinkle in the cottage windows beneath, and one or two stars throbbed in the wide sky above; but in this high open meadow there was still light enough for Geoffrey to see the face of the girl whose hand he held in a warm clasp.

"Let me come, Judith! my last night!" His voice pleaded, his eyes were frankly affectionate; but she shook her head.

"I like to go through the wood alone at night; it is dreamy, and—and rather bogey. Even girls like to be adventurous—in a mild way. It is my America and all the rest! Good-night!"

He held her soft hand another moment and looked hesitatingly into her shining eyes. Would she be very angry? They had always met and parted like brother and sister until these last grown-up years, and this was not a common parting, and he was very fond of his girl-friend, and there were tears on her eyelashes in spite of the brave smile on her lips.

"Good-bye, dear," he said, and drew her to him and kissed her gently—half afraid. When he let her go, Judith said no word, but ran from him, and in another moment her white figure was lost in the gloom of the wood.

Geoffrey was soon in the village. As he passed, he exchanged greetings with every living thing—not a dog was unnoticed.

"Don't ye bide too long yonder," said one old friend.

"Ah, but I'll be fain to see ye safe back in Ernthut!" said another.

It pleased him to know that he was a favourite with his father's folk; all the more because he felt that it was his due. He shook hands with the old people, kissed the children, patted the dogs—and felt that it would be pleasant to come back some day and meet all these kindly faces once more.

As he passed the churchyard, he stood still for a moment and looked along the grass under the yew-trees, the thought involuntarily springing to the surface—"In two years there will be new graves here." Then, with an unpleasant prick to his conscience, came the echo of Judith's remonstrance. Geoffrey liked above all things to have an entirely comfortable conscience. He hated to be found fault with, and still more to suspect that he deserved it. The instant he reached the Vicarage—where the only light burning was in his father's study window—he made up his mind to a piece of heroism, moved by that persistent prick.

"Are you very busy, sir?" he said, entering his father's study, and moving a heap of books from a chair before he could sit down. "I should like a little talk with you, if you can spare time."

Mr. Fielding bent over his desk, surrounded by a seemingly hopeless chaos of books and papers. He was a shrivelled, parchmenty old man, with grey, unkempt hair, and an absent look in his eyes when he took off his spectacles, lifted his bowed head, and turned to Geoffrey, saying, with plaintive emphasis—-

"Busy? yes, yes—terribly busy. What is it? Not another funeral, eh?"

"People don't get buried at ten o'clock at night," Geoffrey said, smiling.

"True, true. I'm perplexed—sorely perplexed. I had been reading in this volume, and had just lighted upon a weighty passage for quotation in my work, when I was sent for to a funeral this morning. They were waiting for me, and I went hastily, and omitted to put a mark in the place, and now I have wasted precious hours searching for it." He put on his glasses, and with trembling hands began once more to turn the yellow pages before him.

"Whose funeral? I had not heard of anyone's death?"

"Funeral, did I say? No, no, it was a wedding,—little Martha Crosbie's wedding,—and John did not like to be kept waiting, Humphrey said, so I went in haste, and this is the consequence. Ah, I am sure it was here! Yes! this is the very passage. Listen;" and he began to read in measured, sonorous tones, a glow of enthusiasm kindling his dim eyes. "Magnificent, isn't it?" he said, pausing at last, and glancing at his son over his glasses. Something in the young man's expression struck him. He pushed the book away with a broken sigh, took off his spectacles, and leaned back in his chair. "I forgot, my boy, I quite forgot that you don't feel as much

interest in Tertullian as I do. I'm afraid my work absorbs me and makes me selfish; it is so much on my mind that I can think of nought else. You came to speak to me about something?"

"I am going away to-morrow, father, and I thought I would like a few words about my plans."

"To-morrow?" Mr. Fielding said, playing nervously with his glasses, and making an effort to collect his thoughts. "That is very soon, Geoffrey. And you mean to be away for two years?"

"Yes, that is what I have arranged. But if you dislike the idea—if you don't want me to go—I can give it up, even now."

He spoke honestly, moved by a sudden impulse of pity, and roused by Judith's words. But he did not at all expect to be taken literally, and wished his words unsaid when he noted their effect. His father's face flushed like a child's, and a gleam of strange tenderness lighted his smile. He put his hand on Geoffrey's arm eagerly.

"Do you mean that, boy? I thought it was a settled thing, and never questioned that it had to be, since you wished it. But if you ask me whether I want you to go—why, you are all I have left in the world, Geoffrey — all I have — except my books!"

That last clause hardened the young man's heart. His father, eagerly watching his face, saw the coldness of disappointment in his eyes, and withdrew his hand.

"I had looked upon it as a settled thing," he repeated. "I never thought of expressing my personal feelings in the matter."

"It is settled," Geoffrey said, "as far as a thing can be. Only, if you had any real objection, of course I would not go. There's no doubt about my wish—but, as you say, there is no one else"—

He hesitated. It was very painful to him to give pain; and as he saw the light die out of his father's face, he knew that he was cruel. It was more to himself than to the other he spoke as he went on—

"You see, if I stay in England, there is nothing for me to do. I can't help you in your literary work; and I must make my way in the world, as other fellows do. You don't really wish me to throw away this chance, do you?"

Mr. Fielding passed his hand hastily across his mouth, and swallowed a lump in his throat, before he said cheerfully, "Certainly not! Why should I interfere? I hoped for a moment that you had changed your mind, and if you could have been content to wait a few years, I should have been selfishly glad. But you are quite right. Why should the young be sacrificed to the old? And I am told that travel is a necessary preliminary to every career in these days.

No doubt it will be a great advantage to you. And this has been but a dull home for you, my boy!"

"It isn't that, father. And I'm not going for my amusement only. I want to see what I am fit for, and look out for an opening."

"I know, I know," Mr. Fielding said, with a little weariness. "It is all quite right. And when you come home, in two years, my book will be out, I trust"—

"And you plunged deeper than ever in the next!"

"Perhaps! There is so much still to be elucidated about the authors of certain early MSS. One line of research leads on to another. In this very passage, for instance"—and he turned again to the volume on the desk.

Geoffrey rose. "I don't think I can stay now, Dad; I've a lot of things to see to; and I'm afraid I don't appreciate the details of your work, because I don't understand them well enough. It will be valuable to scholars, I'm sure; and I wish you good luck with it. So I'll say good-night, and clear off."

Mr. Fielding rose, took Geoffrey's strong young hand between his cold palms, and looked with dumb yearning at the handsome lad. Those blue eyes reminded him of the young bride who had made Ernthwaite an Eden for twelve months.

If either father or son had broken through their habit of reserve, it would have been happier for them.

For one moment the boy longed to throw his arms round the old man's neck, and say that he would never leave him—but the moment passed.

"Good-night, Geoffrey, good-night! God bless you and keep you good!" Mr. Fielding said; and Geoffrey had gone before he sat down again, and laid his grey head upon his desk.

### CHAPTER II

JUDITH went through the dusky woods slowly, her heart aching with pity for herself. Geoffrey was going away for years—perhaps for ever! She felt sure that she could never be even moderately happy again; and that is a terrible conviction to arrive at when one is only eighteen. Moreover, she had to carry the double burden of wounded love and wounded pride. For pride's sake she must keep up a pretence of happiness; and so, before turning out of the woods into the avenue, she dried her tears, and stoically assumed an aspect of cheerfulness, which she felt would deceive anybody.

"Anybody" meant Mrs. Sylvestre, Judith's "Cousin Mary," her guardian and dearest friend. As the girl expected, she was walking up and down in front of the Hall, waiting, in calm enjoyment of the lovely eventide.

"You are late, child; and alone!" was her greeting.
"I thought that, of course, Geoffrey would come with

you to say good-bye to me. Old women don't like to be neglected. I suppose he is really going to-morrow?"

"Oh yes; he will come in the morning and see you. He wanted to come to-night; but I didn't wish it." Judith spoke abruptly, and Mrs. Sylvestre looked at her keenly.

"Have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Ye—es. . . . Just as usual—tennis, and tea, and talk. George Tyson is tiresome; he always wins. And Mr. Smallman will play, and can't play. And, do you know? I begin to think tennis is over-rated. Those two Jackson girls make one sick of it; they talk as if there was nothing in the world to live for but tennis!"

"You are severe, Judith. What is the matter? I suppose you are only tired, and that to-morrow you will love tennis again."

"I don't care if I never play another game!"

Judith's tone was so tragic that Mrs. Sylvestre laughed softly, as she put her arm through the girl's and went up the shallow steps to the open window of the room where she had been sitting.

"You might be renouncing paradise," she said.

"Believe me, my dear, tennis will have charms for you again, some day. And, if not, there are other things in the world."

But though Mrs. Sylvestre pretended to think that

Judith's dejection was merely fatigue, and took no notice of her red eyes, and cheeks blotched with crying, she was not deceived.

The state of affairs had been evident to her for some days past, and she was very sorry, and somewhat vexed. Long after our poor lovelorn maiden was asleep, Mary Sylvestre, who indulged in the bad habit of sitting up late at night, was thinking about her, and wondering what was the best remedy for heart-break.

"Of course it was sure to be," she mused. haps I ought to have taken her about more, and let her see other people, and not have waited quietly for this to happen. The boy is very nice-looking and pleasant; and she was always fond of him, even when they were children. But it is tiresome; and it will be dreadfully stupid for me until she gets over it. Poor child! of course she thinks that will be never. And she will take it rather badly, because she is always thoroughly in earnest, and as constant as—as pain. I suppose I must take her on the Continent—and I hate the Continent! To-morrow it will be no use to speak of such a thing. To-morrow must be devoted to tears for the dear departed. I shall get nothing from her to-morrow but spasmodic snatches of cheerfulness, poor child! But in a day or two I must try Paris and Italy!"

It was as Mrs. Sylvestre foresaw. Geoffrey came

to the Hall early to bid her good-bye. He was in capital spirits, and in a tremendous hurry. But he found time to say to Judith (Mrs. Sylvestre had suggested that she might as well take him through the wood and see that the gates were closed after him)—

"By the by, Judith, I wanted to tell you that you were quite mistaken about the old man. I offered last night to give up my journey if he objected to it; and he said it was much better for me to go. So you ought to apologise for slanging me as you did!"

"I am glad you offered to stay," she said; "and you will be happier too that he approves. Good-bye." And when he had gone—gone, and all her world was a dreary blank, it was a kind of poor comfort to Judith to think that, because of her words, Geoffrey had been magnanimous enough to offer to give up the expedition which he had so much at heart.

Now, Miss Judith Mordaunt always prided herself upon her self-control, and had no pity for sentimental sorrows. Many a time that day she said to herself, "Judith! no weakness!" She spent most of the morning rambling alone in the woods, as she loved to do, and came in with her hands full of flowers, and talked enthusiastically of the lovely mid-summer weather. After luncheon she disappeared again, and Mrs. Sylvestre heard her practising diligently one of Chopin's most difficult nocturnes. Later on, she announced her intention of walking three miles to see

an old woman who lived, as many did, upon the bounty of Mrs. Sylvestre. Judith came in very tired; and the next morning her eyes were heavy,

At luncheon Mrs. Sylvestre said, "Do you think Ernthwaite could do without you, and you without Ernthwaite, for a few months, Judith? Could you leave your native shores without much regret? I have an idea that it would be good for me to try a change. It is fifteen years since I was abroad; and as for you—you have never been out of England—a fact you ought to blush for, in polite society. It is quite disreputable not to know Italy and Switzerland better than Kent or Cumberland. I ought to have taken you long ago. But I am getting very idle"—

"But—but—are you in earnest, Cousin Mary? You have always said you never wanted to go out of England again. It would be too delightful—if you are in earnest!"

Judith revived marvellously at the prospect of Paris to begin with, leading on to Switzerland and Italy. A girl of eighteen, and a first visit to the Continent, mean rapture. And if the prospect was enchanting, the reality was better. Judith enjoyed everything, and was young enough and healthy enough to be indifferent to all drawbacks. Not even her broken heart could interfere materially with her delight in the magical beauty of the Alps. She found, to her surprise, that she often forgot how un-

happy she was; and in the deep interest, to an intelligent girl, of days spent in the old Italian cities, culminating in Venice and Rome, she even lost the aching sense of wishing for the impossible which had seemed as if it could never leave her again for a moment.

At the end of a year, when the travellers came home, Mrs. Sylvestre flattered herself with justice that her cure had been a success. Judith was the picture of health, and in her usual equable and happy spirits.

Mrs. Sylvestre was a woman who generally succeeded in what she undertook. Partly because she always limited her undertakings to her resources; partly because she eschewed all extremes. "Make compromises with life and things, if you want to succeed," she often said. "Never aim high. Be content with second best—for perfection does not appertain to here and now. Moderate desires forestall disappointments."

Mary Sylvestre at forty-five was an exceedingly beautiful woman. The only fault which the severest critic could find in her almost classical face, was that the blue eyes were cold—and that was a fault which the critic himself forgot if he became a friend. At seventeen she had been a lovely girl, with her mind full of romantic ideals. Her parents, anxious to see her "well" married, allowed her to become the

wife of Reginald Sylvestre, who belonged to a county family and was wealthy-without having the least knowledge of his character or antecedents. was dazzled by his fascinating manners and passionate admiration, and dreamt of a happy future with the man between whom and herself there was no single bond, except the brief flame of passion which they called love. His coarse and sensual instincts were as a dead letter to her; there were necessarily no common terms in her character and in his; and for a few weeks even after her marriage the pure-minded girl believed him to be the spotless hero of romance which her fancy had idealised. The awakening to the truth was a horrible experience. The six years of her married life seemed ever afterwards as a black nightmare to Mrs. Sylvestre. She never spoke of that time even to her dearest friends; never mentioned her husband's name, nor allowed anything to be about her which could recall his presence. had no child; her father and mother were dead, and she was alone in the world when her husband's death set her free from the hideous bondage of her marriage. The brilliant, romance-loving girl was changed into a cold, self-contained woman-"cynical," said those who did not like her.

Mary Sylvestre might have regained freedom by legal means before then, but shrank from the publicity of such a step. Many a time during those six years she had prayed for death, and wondered that she could not die; and when the end came, it seemed as if all power of getting good or pleasure out of life was extinet in her. Her husband died in Paris, and they had lived chiefly abroad. Mrs. Sylvestre at once returned to England, and settled at Ernthwaite, her husband's estate in the North. She had never been there with him; in this place, therefore, she made her home, and strenuously set herself to wipe out as far as possible the memory of the past, and to begin a new life.

The rich and beautiful young widow did not remain a widow for lack of suitors. But she shuddered at the thought of marriage, and avoided the society of men. Society, in any form, had little attraction for her; but she was too sensible to allow herself to indulge in morbid desires for solitude, and recognised the dangers of too self-absorbed an existence. She lived as other wealthy people live; did not deny herself to visitors, nor refuse social intercourse. She took a slight interest in the affairs of the parish, a large part of which was her property; and was liberal to all parochial needs.

But the wisest thing Mrs. Sylvestre ever did—so she always maintained—was to adopt Judith Mordaunt, when, at the age of five, the child was left an orphan. Judith's mother was Mrs. Sylvestre's cousin and friend. She died when the little one was born; the

father five years later. He had been twice married; but Judith's step-brother and sister were already grown up, and in homes of their own. The question arose what was to be done with little Judith. me have her," wrote Mary Sylvestre to Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith, Judith's step-sister. "You have your own babies. I have no one, and it will be something to interest me to bring up the child; and if I ever love her, as I did her mother, it will keep me from getting de-humanised. Only, if you all consent to this, no one must interfere henceforth. educate her my own way. Her money can accumulate until she is of age-or marries, if I do not teach her to do something better with herself than that. And if I die meanwhile, she shall have what I can leave her. The estate is entailed. Let me have her!"

The child proved a godsend to the lonely woman. People who always see the worst side of other people's affairs said that Mrs. Sylvestre was too cold to be a mother to the motherless little one, and wasted unnecessary pity upon the child. As a matter of fact, Judith's childhood was as happy and cloudless as childhood ought to be. She was a bright, healthy, happy-hearted little maiden from the first; an easy child to deal with because of her frank, honest, and fearless disposition. There was a wholesomeness about her which was exactly what was wanted to

counteract the unnatural sorrows of Mrs. Sylvestre's former life; and she found her heart soften and her bitter thoughts vanish in the sunshine of childish innocence and merriment.

Someone asked Mrs. Sylvestre once what system of education she intended to pursue with the child. Mrs. Sylvestre answered that she had no theory—except that education ought to make a child happy day, by day, and fit her to be happy in the future.

To that end Mrs. Sylvestre believed that the first thing to consider was bodily health with skilled activity of limb and muscle; the second, a sound moral sense of the difference between right and wrong; and thirdly, the development of intellectual tastes and the cultivation of mental faculties.

"If"-so wrote Mrs. Sylvestre to Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith—"if a girl can ride and row, dance, walk, and play tennis, she has those five physical defences against Then, if she has also some love for unhappiness. music and art and books, and cares a little, intelligently, for flowers and animals, or for sewing, or even cookery, she has so many sources of happiness in her own control. If one fails, another may be possible. I do not trouble much about playfellows for Judith. I mean her to learn to be content without companions. People just as often as not make one another miser-Judith shall learn not to depend upon anyone but herself for happiness. Women suffer chiefly

through others, because they are never taught to be self-reliant and self-sufficing (not self-sufficient). Affection is not everything, though girls are often brought up to think it is. I love the child, and she loves me, and we are very happy together. But I want her also to be happy without me, and not to look to me, nor to anyone, for happiness, but to learn that it depends upon herself.

"No doubt she will have to be unhappy, like the rest, sometimes—if she lives to be a woman. But I want to put it off as long as possible. I think characters ripen and blossom best in happiness. I am not a believer in the salutary discipline of east wind and frost in youth. I believe that if this were a happier world it would also be a better world; and I think the best specific against unhappiness is self-dependence."

Judith certainly took very kindly to the régime, and justified Mrs. Sylvestre's method. In the holidays she had Geoffrey Fielding for a companion, and the five daughters of Dr. Tyson. But as they all went away to school in turns, she was left a good deal to herself. She had a governess; and as she grew up, Mrs. Sylvestre went several times to London for two or three months, in order to give her good music lessons—music being her chief gift. Judith was not remarkably clever, and she was entirely free of the romantic tendencies to which Mrs.

Sylvestre attributed the fatal error of her own youth. Most carefully did she watch for any sign of sentimentality in Judith, and was quick to show the absurdity of it, and to laugh it out of existence.

Another extract from Mrs. Sylvestre's letters, written when Judith was sixteen, is characteristic:—

"Thank Heaven, Judith promises, as far as I can judge, to be a commonplace, matter-of-fact woman, so I think she may have a chance of being a happy one. She is at present what one must call very ordinary, I am glad to say. She does not show the least inclination towards poetry, or pessimism, or idealism, or hysteria in any form.

"She is simply a dear, good girl; and is intensely blissful to-day because the hyacinths are making the ground blue in the woods, exactly as they do every spring. I never saw anyone love flowers, and fields, and trees, and open air generally as she does. any poetical or artistic way, but merely as if they were all friends, and part of her life. Her one trial. hitherto, has been the necessity of leaving Ernthwaite now and then. But when we get to town, she enjoys the music, and the theatres, and the sights, and is never discontented. Her favourite companion at present—after the dogs—is the gardener's little boy, whom she bribes with toffee not to take birds' They have expeditions together after wild flowers, and watch the bees and beetles together, all

in a very unscientific manner. No; I do not mean to send her to school. I think she knows quite as much as most school-educated girls I see; and as for passing examinations, the preparation would weary her brain, and perhaps weaken her health—and to what end? She will never need to earn a living. And if she differs from the regulation pattern of young ladies, what does it matter? I trust she will never want to marry, and I like her as she is. Most people find her a pleasant girl. She is not very pretty, for which also I am thankful; but she is growing tall and straight, is beautifully erect and graceful, and in perfect health."

One of Dr. Tyson's five daughters, Gladys, was the same age as Judith, and the two girls were chief friends; while the doctor's lively house gradually became more and more attractive to Judith as the daughters came home from school. George Tyson, the one son, was seldom at home, and Geoffrey Fielding spent less time in Ernthwaite as he grew up. But he was there quite enough to keep up his intimacy with Judith—the melancholy consequences of which have already been related, and Mrs. Sylvestre's prompt action thereupon.

When they came home from their long tour on the Continent, Judith was able to talk openly about Geoffrey, and to share Gladys Tyson's regret at his absence from the tennis parties. She even expressed

her opinion that his letters to his father, which Mr. Fielding gave her to read, were remarkably uninteresting. Mrs. Sylvestre fully concurred; but while she found them so uninteresting that she could not even take the trouble to read any more, Judith read every word of every letter, and knew a great deal better than Mr. Fielding himself where Geoffrey had arrived on such or such a date, and where he was The wanderer made no mention likely to be next. yet of a probable return, and his programme of travel seemed to extend indefinitely. He wrote with fair regularity, and still spoke hopefully of the "opening" for which he was on the lookout. But the letters were little more than a list of names and dates. They always ended with the formula—" Kind regards to all inquiring friends," and expressed affectionate hopes for his father's health and welfare.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fielding was more than ever absorbed in his work, and showed himself less and less capable of fulfilling the duties of his position. Whispers were heard that complaints were about to be made to the bishop; and the dissenters loudly asserted that such a vicar was a scandal, and ought to be removed.

One day, a month or two after Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith had returned to Ernthwaite, Dr. Tyson came to the Hall in great trouble about the vicar.

"I don't know what is to be done," he said.

"If you don't know, who does?" said Mrs. Sylvestre. "But tell me all about it. I suppose there is always something that can be done in every emergency."

These two were fast friends; each admired and trusted the other; and "when they put their heads together," Judith used to say, "the result was always nice for somebody."

"Well, you know," said the doctor, "it's quite true that he isn't up to his work; and yet we can't tell him so, and turn him out of the Vicarage. He thinks if he thinks at all about it—that if he gets himself into his surplice, and proses through the services on Sundays, and mumbles out one of his old sermons (it don't matter which—the girls tell me they've had the same three weeks running, and a Christmas sermon on Whitsunday), he has done all that is expected of It's getting almost more than Humphrey can do to rout him out of his study to take a funeral, or to wed folks when they are waiting at the altar. And as for visiting the sick, my dear lady, he never goes near 'em! It isn't want of right feeling. don't believe there's a kinder-hearted man nor a better Christian in the land. I've known him nigh thirty years, and I never heard him say a hard word of any man. But it doesn't do, you know, in these days, for a parson to depend upon that. It isn't so much to be a Christian, and a good, honest gentle-

man, that's wanted nowadays. That used to be enough thirty years ago. But this is a day of paying by results, Mrs. Sylvestre. In the good, easy old days we used to let one another alone, and if a man did no harm to anyone, we let him be. Now the parson is expected to be the life and soul of the parish—so my girls say. Preaching's not of so much account as fussing, and poking into everything, and 'organising,' as they call it. 'Look at Stonethwaite,' they say. There's a live vicar setting this on foot, and that on foot—interfering, as I call it, in matters that are no business of his. We want a 'live' church, a 'live' vicar, perks up my little Winifred, as if she knew anything about it!" doctor paused to laugh good-humouredly.

"She is an extremely 'live' young lady," Mrs. Sylvestre said, "and I daresay she is right."

"Then George comes down from London," Dr. Tyson went on, "and he sneers at the whole business, and says that a mummified parson like poor Fielding is more harmless than a galvanically active one; and that if all the vicars in England were like ours, the old superstition would die out sooner, and the dissolution of the Church be a more peaceful business than looks likely since its latest revival. Now, George is a very clever fellow, but I don't like this kind of talk; and I am sorry when I see that matters are not satisfactory about our own Church. I'm old-

fashioned enough to believe in the Catechism still, and I don't see that because it's old-fashioned it's false; nor that we are to be told we've been a pack of idiots to believe in it, until they show us something more credible and better."

Doctor Tyson's kindly, shrewd face had clouded, and Mrs. Sylvestre hastened to say—

"George is getting on splendidly, I hear."

"Splendidly;" and the father's pride quickly overcame his vexation. "He's done remarkably well in his last exams. He is to be at Guy's now for work in the wards for a twelvemonth. Sir James Biggun wrote me a most complimentary note the other day, and assures me that he is one of the most promising young men of his day."

Judith was standing at the table arranging roses in a china bowl. She tossed a flower impatiently from her when George was mentioned, and hardly waited for Dr. Tyson to finish his eulogy before she broke out—

"Well, but, Dr. Tyson, it doesn't matter a bit what George and Winnie think of poor Mr. Fielding. What can be done while he lives? You would not disturb him—turn him out, or anything unkind?"

"No, no, certainly not. But something must be done. If the papers took it up, or the bishop, poor old Fielding would get into trouble. Then he has no more idea of financing than a baby. He is in debt for books and parchments and things of that sort, and goes on increasing his liabilities. And he gives away money to anyone who asks for it, and though he lives upon next to nothing, he seems to let money slip through his fingers. I'm afraid his house-keeper cheats him."

Judith nodded. "I've been afraid of that too. She is a stranger; a south country woman, and"—

"My dear Judith, how absurd you are! She need not cheat because she does not belong to the north country," Mrs. Sylvestre broke in, laughing. "Now, Dr. Tyson, what do you say to this suggestion? Why should we not get a curate, and let him 'organise,' and set things on foot, and bury and marry the people, and then the vicar can be left in peace. Would not that put things right? or as right as they can be put in a wrong world?"

"Exactly; a curate is the article we want. But a curate must be paid decently to come here, where he would have all the work."

"Oh, that can be done. Set up begging machinery in the parish for one thing. Beatrice understands all that business. And then, I will take care that the poor man gets paid. Curates are not very dear, are they?"

"That depends upon the age and appearance—doesn't it, Judith? Girls find them 'dear' generally,

don't they? It will be a rare excitement for the lasses. Seriously, Mrs. Sylvestre, I'm afraid there is nothing for it but the curate. Are you really inclined to undertake the expense? We ought to offer £150, and the parish won't raise much."

"Curates are quite out of fashion," Judith said,
"'not wore now,' as Miss Owthwaite says. But still
a curate is a man, more or less, and it will be a boon
to society here to supply another coat. I think it is
a lovely idea of yours, Cousin Mary."

"Then the motion is carried, I suppose. And, Dr. Tyson, if you and your fellow churchwarden (I forget who he is) will find the curate and settle it all, I suppose Mr. Fielding will be quite willing to consent. And while you are arranging that with him, could you not find out the amount of his debts? It cannot be much. Let me pay it for him, and then the old man will be free."

"That's a woman in a thousand!" was Dr. Tyson's mental comment, as he got into his gig, and waved his hand to the two ladies, who had come to the door "to see him off" in homely north-country style: Mrs. Sylvestre stately and calm, as though she had never known a heartache; Judith caressing a collie dog which sprang to greet her as she came down the steps.

"Doctor," she said, lifting a laughing face, "do let him be tall, and nice-looking, and musical; and oh, be sure he can play tennis!"

## CHAPTER III

Dr. Tyson's house was not more than a mile from Ernthwaite Hall, but as it was near the railway station, the inn, and the lake, it was at the centre of the life of the village. It is said that in London one has one's hands on the pulse of the world. In Dr. Tyson's house "the girls" might be said to have their nimble fingers on the pulse of Ernthwaite. All the comings and goings were of necessity known to them; and though the good, sensible doctor knew how to keep "lips well shut, eyes well open" as strictly as most men, he could not prevent scraps of gossip leaking out now and then, when he was in the company of his lively daughters.

His was a household brimming over with vitality. Each member of it (except, perhaps, the placid mother, who often wondered how she had managed to be the mother of six such wonderful beings as her children) considered it a matter of supreme importance that his or her energies should be ceaselessly engaged.

Judith Mordaunt—who was behind the times, and cared for none of the things which to them were most worth caring for—called Dr. Tyson's house "Nineteenth Century Villa"; and his family the "Up-to-date" girls.

The "New Woman" had not yet been discovered. The girls were merely "modern" in the sense that they had each a large share of self-satisfaction, and a conviction that young people were born to correct the stupid prejudices of their parents. This almost sublime attribute of self-esteem shed a pleasant atmosphere of cheerful complacency over the family. There was no time for one of these active, energetic girls to fall a victim to ennui, or to morbid sentimentalities. Each one had a "career" to pursue. idea of love was relegated to a second place in the programme of life. If it happened to come, they would begin to think of it seriously. At present, other things occupied their attention. "What is to be your career, Judith?" Beatrice, the eldest, asked her solemnly one day. "You do not seem to realise what a responsibility life is. You ought, by this time, to be following some vocation. You ought to make up your mind, and do some good. You are wasting such precious years."

Judith laughed, as if life looked anything but serious to her, as she answered—

"Oh, I don't want to have either mission or

vocation, thank you, Beatrice, except to be happy in this nice old world! I think life is delicious; at least mine is. I find something new to enjoy every day, and if I live to be a hundred, I don't believe I shall have had time to enjoy it all!"

"But how selfish! how useless to your fellow-creatures! Surely you mean to do something for the benefit of others? to devote yourself to the advancement of some good cause?"

"Yes; if I must have a mission, I'll show people how to be happy, though useless!" the girl replied, and Beatrice left her in displeasure.

Beatrice was the religiously minded one; and from early youth had been a thorn in the side of poor Mr. Fielding by reason of the unsolicited assistance she gave him in all parochial matters. She was constantly instituting something for the edification or benefit of the parish—cottage services, mothers' meetings, sick clubs; and though the things instituted usually fell through (owing to the vicar's criminal want of interest in them, said Beatrice), she was not discouraged, and always began a new enterprise. She was ten years older than Gladys and Judith Mordaunt, and was therefore looked upon by them as quite elderly, and privileged to give advice, if she wished to do so-as she generally did.

The next girl, Maud, had gone in for sick-nursing, with all the zeal characteristic of the family; and at

the age of twenty-six was already high on the nursing She had wished to follow staff of a London hospital. the medical profession; but her father, and even her brother George (so strong is male prejudice) resolutely opposed her; and she could not carry out her desire without funds. Her whole heart was in her work, and she seldom came home. As a matter of fact, her occasional visits were not looked forward to with entire delight by the family. She worried her mother into a state of chronic nervousness about drainage and ventilation; and argued with her father upon the right treatment of his cases until he almost lost his temper.

"I shall not go to 'The Nineteenth' again while Maud is down here," Judith confided to Mrs. Sylvestre. "I don't like to be looked at as if I were nothing but a bundle of bones, and organs, and things; and to be told not to eat this, and not to wear that. There will be no pleasure left in living at all if we are to think so dreadfully much about what Martha Robinson calls 'our poor dear insides!' We might be all old women of eighty, or miserable dyspeptics. I told her to-day that I hated the very word sanitation, and she looked as if I had spoken blasphemy."

Maud Tyson was probably the least popular of the sisters, though the most useful. But that is the way of an ungrateful world. She was a handsome woman, with a brisk, decided expression, an assured manner,

and an air of knowing much better what was good for you than you knew yourself; an air which seemed to imply that she recognised your individual liberty of thought only from courtesy, but that, if she chose, she could prove to you that you were killing yourself; and that she would take you in hand, and put you to rights, if you humbly requested it. Most people dislike being put to rights when they are ignorant of any such necessity; and it was always somewhat of a relief when Maud Tyson was summoned back to the sphere of work where she was thoroughly appreciated.

Muriel, the third daughter, had distinguished herself in the higher mathematics. She was already armed with a goodly number of certificates, and was now studying hard to take the B.Sc. degree at the London University. But she bore her honours modestly; teased no one else to ride her special hobbies, and was a very sweet-tempered girl. She had been ambitious to go to Girton; but Dr. Tyson reluctantly found himself unable to afford the expense, and Muriel had been obliged to content herself with one of the London girls' colleges for two or three years.

Since she came home, she had tried to persuade Gladys and Winnie and Judith Mordaunt to join one of the numerous societies for systematic reading; but with little success. Judith and Mrs. Sylvestre read a great deal together; but not "to order." Gladys

openly confessed that she was not fond of reading; and Winnie declared that she knew much better what literature was good for *her*, than any "society" could know.

After Muriel came Gladys, Judith's chief friend, the beauty of the family.

"As for my vocation in life," she would say, tossing her pretty head saucily, "my vocation is to look nice for the sake of the family reputation, and attend to the dress and finery department. Beatrice thinks it is pious to be dowdy. Maud lives in uniform, and Muriel will get her cap and gown soon. One of us must dress decently. And then they will have to marry me off magnificently, for the sake of the family, by and by. It would be a scandal for us all five to be old maids; and I don't see how any one of the others will have time for such frivolity as marriage!"

The youngest, but in some respects the most remarkable of all, was Winifred—a budding genius, though she had not fully made up her mind yet what line of development her genius would take. Art had long been her passion; but she felt herself also to be a poet. She rambled over the country and sketched, producing marvellous effects in the way of flaming sunsets and flowery fields. She dressed herself in fearfully and wonderfully made garments of æsthetic greens and blues, touzled her hair, and

set up an easel in the old schoolroom. She had almost decided to make her mark as an artist; but when winter came, and sketching was impossible, she began to write a tragedy, in blank verse, on the history of Charlotte Corday, and admired it so much that she neglected her easel for her desk.

Gladys told her that such indecision would be But Winnie replied that it was nonfatal to success. sense to suppose one could tell, just at first, in what form genius would flow most freely. She instanced Thackeray,—as much artist as author in the beginning; Sir Frederick Leighton,—both sculptor and painter; Rossetti; Ruskin himself, who might have been artist or poet, as easily as a prose writer. Winnie felt that it was rather a proof of genius than otherwise, that she had creative impulses in more than one direction. At anyrate, she was confident that, so long as she diligently cultivated all her gifts, she was on the right way; the over-mastering impulse would show itself when fully ripe for expression; --- and so on, and so on.

It was difficult to silence Winifred when she began to discourse on "genius"; and she did not easily see when her sisters were laughing at her. She had a way of pronouncing final verdicts upon abstruse questions with the infallible assurance of "sweet seventeen," which was delightful. Hypnotism, she could assure you, had nothing in it—she had gone into it

for herself. Evolution could be doubted by none but a fool. Orthodoxy was only a survival. In literature she was advanced. Scott and Wordsworth were old fogies. Swinburne was her pet poet. She could pooh-pooh eminent Academicians as glibly as any rising young artist among the Great Unhung. "Millais could not paint; the President could not draw."

Of course Winifred had revelled in the hysterical Journal of Marie Bashkertcheff. She felt that she would even be willing to die at twenty-four, could she feel sure that her journal would become equally famous. She started a journal at once; but nothing ever happened in Ernthwaite, and she was not able to break away from the inglorious security of home to seek adventures in independent paths.

The worst of it was, that few people took her seriously. Sometimes her vigorous expressions of opinion shocked her mother and irritated her father. Her sisters only laughed at her. At one time she undertook to explain Browning to them; from which piece of audacity it may be seen that Winnie had, at least, one undoubted mark of genius—she believed in herself.

George Tyson, the brother of these five girls, will have a very small part to play in this little history; but he was a person of vast importance in their eyes, and in his own estimation.

Dr. Tyson, himself, had a heart of gold, and a keen

shrewd brain. He was one of those old-fashioned country practitioners who have, in so many cases, been the best friends of the rural poor for a century back; the truest guardians of their interests; almost the sole bringers of light and civilisation to many remote districts. Of his good wife there is nothing to say. She was practically "occulted" by the stronger personalities of her daughters.

A house where there are girls in the family is always cheerful. It has a pleasant, homelike feeling in its very aspect. One sees a girl's face at a window as one approaches. When the front door opens, a girl's figure is flitting downstairs, or across the hall. There is the sound of music in the distance; and, pleasanter still, the tinkle of girls' laughter and chattering tongues. In the drawing-room there are "things" everywhere which speak of the presence There is no formality in the arrangement of girls. of the furniture. Books are ready for use on convenient tables; music is scattered about the open piano; pretty work-baskets and such feminine trifles lie about casually; there is a canary in a gilt cage; fresh flowers are prettily placed where they catch the eye; the writing-table stands in a good light; the window-seat is alluring; the easy chairs are drawn up to the fire. A stranger entering the Tysons' large, shabby drawing-room would see just such a picture, and feel instinctively that here would be no cold ceremoniousness, but cheery welcome and friendly sociability.

One autumn afternoon, shortly after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Judith Mordaunt and Gladys Tyson, returning from a long walk, came into this room together. Muriel, poring over a book close to the window to get the last moments of daylight, and Winnie, who was on a stool before the fire, her hands clasped round her knees, probably composing poetry, were in the room.

"Muriel," Judith said solemnly, "we have seen him!"

Muriel closed her book, leaned back against the side of the window, and said, smiling carelessly—

"Have you really? Well, I daresay that's very interesting information, if I knew who 'him' is."

"What a horrible want of imagination learned people have!" Judith exclaimed. "Winnie, listen! We have seen him! Surely you have more curiosity than Muriel. But she is only pretending. As if there could be two 'hims' at once in Ernthwaite!"

"I suppose you mean the curate. I have seen him too; but he is quite old!" said Winnie, in a tone which implied that the fact of being old precluded the possibility of being interesting.

"Not precisely 'old,' though past the first bloom of youth—like my hat," Gladys said, as she tossed her hat and jacket upon a chair. "He is over thirty, we think. And I'll tell you what Judith and I have been arranging. Beatrice isn't here?" and she looked cautiously towards the door.

"No. She's gone to a school inspection at Lockthwaite, but will be in soon. We promised to wait tea for her."

"Judith and I have agreed that if the curate is to be accommodated with a Mrs. Curate here,—and of course he must be (we can't lose such an opportunity!), —Beatrice must be the victim."

"How horrid of you, Gladys! The instant the man has appeared in the place," Winnie began indignantly, for, like some other people of genius, she was lacking in the sense of humour.

"Oh, long before he appeared, I wondered which of us would be likely to suit him! But we think only Beatrice would do, as he is so sadly old."

"Gladys is inventing all this," Judith said, laughing.
"We never spoke of Beatrice. I couldn't have said such a thing, because I always thought that Beatrice"—then she hesitated.

"Come, say it out! Truthful Judith caught once more! Beatrice isn't here, and we won't tell. You thought she was almost married and done for already, didn't you? But Mr. Jackson"—

"Gladys, don't!" Muriel remonstrated. "She would not like us to talk about it."

Gladys stood before the mirror, which hung over

the mantelpiece, and arranged her hair. "But you all know as well as I do," she went on, "that in spite of her age and her virtues Beatrice is, in all human probability, as she would say, the destined bride of "—

A voice was heard in the hall, a rather loud, strident voice, and Gladys was silenced. In a moment, Beatrice came in, followed by the servant with the tea-tray.

Half an hour later, when Judith rose to go home, Muriel said—

"You never told us what you thought of the curate, after all, Judith?"

"Because I didn't think of him at all. I thought only of poor Mr. Fielding, and hoped the curate would be considerate to him, and not hurt his feelings. But now that I do think of him, I think he had a nice, kind expression."

"That is nothing to go by," Beatrice said, with unusual severity. "What is kindness compared to principle? I am amazed at father for making such a selection. Mr. Dale has no views."

"Poor man!" ejaculated Gladys.

"It is not a matter to make fun of, Gladys. He seems hopelessly weak and amiable, and openly says that he is not going to alter Mr. Fielding's arrangements for the present. Mr. Jackson says that he evidently belongs to the new Broad School—which is simply another name for Latitudinarianism. He came to the schools at Lockthwaite to-day, and Mr. Jackson

asked him to address the children, and there was no dignity in his manner, and no gospel truth in what he said. He might have been only a friend of the children. He will be a failure, I am sorry to say."

When Judith repeated Beatrice's verdict to Mrs. Sylvestre, that lady's comment was—

"I am very glad to hear it. It gives me good hopes of the man, that Mr. Jackson and Beatrice Tyson do not approve of him."

## CHAPTER IV

Mr. Dale, the new curate, called at Ernthwaite Hall the next day. When Judith returned from a ride, she found him in earnest conversation with Mrs. Sylvestre. At least, there was no doubt that he was in earnest. As she listened to him, she began to wonder what it was that lighted his plain face into an expression of almost beauty. He had a sympathetic voice, too, so that his plainness was forgotten when he talked.

"No, I am never afraid of being dull or bored," he was saying. "I was only afraid that after the roar of London, this quiet haven would be voiceless to me. After ten years of East-End life, I was afraid that the faculty of enjoying fields and flowers and hills would be lost."

"I am glad you like the place," Mrs. Sylvestre said.

"It is much more than liking. You will think it an exaggeration, but perhaps flowers and birds and skies mean more to me because I have seen so little of them

for so long. Then it's an immense comfort to me to know that the capacity for enjoying Nature does not wither as quickly as I feared; and that all the poor souls who are condemned to that city life—prisoners of poverty—could awaken to the loveliness of this other world, if they had the chance. I have vague dreams already of getting some of them here—just to give them a vision of the world as God made it."

"But, Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "all the people who live in cities are not prisoners—far from it. Many of them choose it, and pity us among our primroses and cattle. Don't you remember Charles Lamb's verdict, that Fleet Street was better to live in than Skiddaw? and yet Lamb was a poet. We waste a great deal of compassion, I think, upon people who don't want it. Your East-Enders would find Ernthwaite intolerably dull."

"As you were afraid that I should," he said, smiling. "Some of them perhaps might choose town life. But if the conditions of the country were as they should be, most men would be happiest in the country. There is a deep-seated love of the country in English hearts. Men and women only flock to cities to make a living."

Mrs. Sylvestre smiled.

"If the conditions of either town or country life were as they ought to be, there would be no need for enthusiasts and reformers any more. I suppose, on the whole, it is well for much to remain imperfect in the present state of things, in order to supply scope for men like you. You would be miserable, I suppose, if you could not work yourself to death in efforts to mend matters."

"Well," he laughed, "Browning says-

'A man's grasp should exceed his reach, Or what's a Heaven for?'

I am not sure that some of us would ever be content. But we want to make life down here a little more heaven-like than it is—in the East End. Even country life may not be the abstract Best "—

"Is it not better to avoid superlatives?" interrupted Mrs. Sylvestre. "'Best' puts things hopelessly far off."

"Pardon me! No human aim can be 'hopelessly' good. A man cannot think anything better than the thoughts of his Creator; and no thought of His can be unrealisable. Somehow, I don't think we are meant to be satisfied with anything which is easy to get. Satisfaction is fatal to further effort. Life is just continued effort. We only live to struggle"—

"And to fail. Is it worth while?" Mrs. Sylvestre broke in.

"But," Judith said, speaking for the first time, her eager, fresh young voice sounding a new note, "it is not always failure. And if it were, remember 'Not failure, but low aim is crime.' Surely it is more

manly to strive after something beyond your strength, than to be satisfied with easy little trumpery things."

"That sounds very fine and heroic, - especially when put into blank verse, my dear, — but it is nonsense. A man does well what he does easily. Straining after giants' tasks is childish waste of energy. He makes a miserable muddle of what he can't do, and ruins his health into the bargain." Mrs. Sylvestre indicated Mr. Dale with a movement of her "For the last half-hour you have been confessing that you have half killed yourself in your fight against the existing order of things in that horrible East End of London. Out of your own mouth I judge you. Of course you have been beaten -shipwrecked, let us say, and driven into this little harbour of refuge to be refitted. If you had not tried to do impossibilities, might you not have kept well and been still able for useful work there? Life is one long compromise "---

"No, no!" interrupted the other two voices; but Mrs. Sylvestre went on calmly—

"Some day you will both agree with me; and I never argue. Meanwhile, we will have tea."

Judith had laid aside her hat and gloves. She came nearer the fireside when the tea-table arrived, and the blaze brightened her fair young face. After some conversation she said—

"I am so glad you think Ernthwaite beautiful,

Mr. Dale. They laugh at me for thinking so; and of course it isn't one of the show places. The guide-books ignore us; and tourists go direct from the station to the steamer, and away up the lake, and say there is nothing to be seen here."

"My dear Judith, you need not grumble at that merciful delusion if it keeps the tourists and trippers from us!"

"But I don't like Ernthwaite to be snubbed," the girl insisted. "It is so beautiful, if it isn't a show place. Do you know our country well, Mr. Dale?"

"No. I have not been up this lake yet, nor seen any of the show places. But I shall not feel the beauty of any other place as of this. I came here direct from the grime and noise and hideousness of my old home, and the charm of it has laid hold upon me like a spell."

"I'm so glad!" Judith said. "Tell me what you mean exactly, please. No one ever spoke of Ernthwaite like that before."

The new curate looked straight into her eager eyes and smiled. Judith never allowed anyone to call him plain again. His smile broke down all conventional barriers, and established him as her friend from that moment.

"I will tell you what I mean—exactly—if I can," he said. "But sometimes meanings won't go well into words, will they?"

"In such cases is it not probable that they are not worth troubling about?" Mrs. Sylvestre remarked, as she stirred her tea meditatively, and glanced with calm eyes at the eager faces of the others. "Is it not wise to be content with the concrete? Don't you think that, on the whole, life is too short for metaphysics, and 'meanings that won't go into words'?"

"Ah, you are too bad!" Judith exclaimed. "It is just those meanings that are best worth having when one can get at them—or guess at them!"

Mr. Dale laughed.

"Mrs. Sylvestre is quite right. Nothing ought to be talked about that is not real enough to crystallise naturally into speech."

"Oh, granted! Cousin Mary is always right, of course. But one can't submit to people who are always right, invariably. It isn't good for them. So never mind her, and do tell me, please, how, why, when, and where Ernthwaite laid a spell upon you?" Judith had clasped her hands, and leaned forward in an attitude of entreaty.

The curate thought she made a pretty picture so; the firelight struck gleams of gold in her soft brown hair and danced in her grey eyes. He took one moment to fix the picture in his mind. Then he shook himself mentally, and got up.

"Yes, I will tell you all that, some time. At this

moment I must resist spells of every kind. I ought to be at the schools in fifteen minutes. It would be a bad beginning to break an appointment for the sake of what Mrs. Sylvestre calls 'metaphysics,' wouldn't it?"

"Very well. But remember, it is a promise. Some day, when we are alone, you must tell me. You know you will be obliged to see a great deal of us, because we are everywhere in Ernthwaite. We do not often go away like other people. I hate going away. And we have no 'vocations.' And so we—at least I—shall be always turning up in every nook and corner of the parish."

Judith put her hand into his with the frank air natural to her, and emphasised her speech with a little friendly nod.

"You make the prospect of life in Ernthwaite more and more delightful," Mr. Dale began.

Mrs. Sylvestre stood up to bid him good-bye. "Judith always speaks the truth, but rather non-sensical truth," she said. "Unless you spend your time in rambling over the fells, or hunting for wild-flowers in bogs and becks, you will be able to escape her. When you want to see me, you must come here. Please understand that I consider it my only necessary function in life to attend to the financial needs of this little parish. You must always let me know when you want anything. I hope you will

find Ernthwaite pleasant, and regain strength here. Good-bye."

When he had gone, Judith stood looking into the fire with unusually serious eyes for two minutes without speaking. Mrs. Sylvestre leaned back in her chair, and waited until Judith said—

"I like that man. I believe in him. He is not quite like everybody else; he has a good old face. He makes one feel a wee bit sad, or serious, or something of that sort—I hardly know what; but I like him. He is good, I am sure. What a blessing it will be to Ernthwaite"—

"My dear Judith!" Mrs. Sylvestre interrupted, "before all things, beware of cant. To whom is he going to be a blessing? To the old men and women who come to church to sleep quietly? or to us—to give us something new to talk about? I hope he will take a burden off the poor old vicar's shoulders, and let him die in peace in his home. But as for being 'a blessing,'—Ernthwaite has got on very comfortably without a curate until now. I only trust he won't rouse sleeping dogs with his enthusiasms and make us all uncomfortable."

"We have gone on in a humdrum, sleepy, donothing way, if that's what you call comfortable! We have never seemed even aware of any need to raise the condition"—

"For pity's sake, hush, child! Are you beginning

already? The man has only been talking to you for twenty minutes, and already you chatter glibly about 'raising the condition of the people.' What have we been thinking of to bring a curate down upon this unhappy village? If the first result is to set you girls worrying to 'raise its condition,' there will be no more peace for any of us!" And Mrs. Sylvestre sighed, and shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"You will be the first to help with your chequebook, notwithstanding!" Judith retorted.

"You are an impertinent child, to sneer at my cheque-book. Really, I thought you were too sensible to lose your head because the man happened to praise Ernthwaite."

"It was not only that I liked him for," Judith said thoughtfully; "it was an indescribable air of trustworthiness. At all events, there is no fear of losing one's heart—if one's head goes. He is not in the very least the kind of man to—to—you will laugh at me, but I couldn't help thinking it—not the kind of man to fall in love with any girl. Gladys will be disappointed."

"I wonder if a girl ever meets a new man without thinking of such a contingency?" Mrs. Sylvestre said, without expressing her opinion on the point in question.

Judith laughed, and was silent for a few minutes.

Mrs. Sylvestre took up a book which was on the table beside her, and began to cut the leaves.

"I wonder what the others will think of him?" the girl said presently. "I wonder what his 'views,' as Beatrice calls it, really are? Had you found out before I came in?"

"Oh dear no!" Mrs. Sylvestre answered. "What do his 'views' matter to us, if he conducts himself as a gentleman? On the whole, from what we have seen, I fancy we might have done worse."

every branch and bramble, every copse and dingle, At a little distance the was ablaze with colour. woods looked like gigantic bouquets of flowers. by, one could distinguish the deep orange of the beeches, the various shades of yellow from amber to tawny brown of the elms and sycamores; the tender crimson of the wild cherry, the pale gold of the Beneath the trees the ground was larches. mosaic of fallen leaves, mixed with exquisite masses of burnished bronze or dull gold - coloured bracken, and here and there touches of reds and browns from the fading foliage of the underwood. Now and then a trailing bramble made a brilliant patch of scarlet or purple—each leaf a miracle of gorgeous colour; or clusters of glowing berries gleamed among the green of the straggling hedgerow. Farther away against the pale sky, the fells seemed to be spread with tapestries of royal hue-purple and gold; and the fir-woods climbed the ridges with dark spearpoints, erect and countless.

Everywhere the triumph of colour crowned the happy death of summer flowering and autumn fruition.

Even the irregular low stone wall by the roadside was a wonder and delight to Jonathan Dale, new from the dull London streets. Each stone had its enamel work of moss and lichen; dainty ferns, or tufts of Herb Robert, with its circle of crimson leaves, filled each crevice; sprays of delicately-veined ivy trailed about the wall, and branches of wild rose bushes hung over it, bending with their jewelled burden of scarlet hips.

Only a common road and common things. But to the town-bred man it was a revelation; and he realised with ever-renewed gladness that this was his home.

It required some effort to bring himself into the vein to discuss school matters, and to sympathise with the master's difficulties; and when the first interview was over, he went on still more reluctantly, to see what he could prevail upon the old vicar to sanction in the way of necessary reforms. He hated the idea of disturbing and upsetting the existing order of things, and yet, when the existing order was gross disorder, what else was to be done?

He had already begun to see that his path was not to be all smoothness. Still, roughness had no terror for him, and the worst thing he had yet encountered was the indifference of the vicar. He knocked two or three times before the door of the Vicarage was opened by the woman who "managed" for Mr. Fielding.

"Well, yes, I suppose you can come in," was her greeting. "But there seems to be no peace for the master sin' you came to Ernthut. Yon's Mr. Jackson from Lockthut, now! But you can go in."

Mr. Dale would gladly have retreated when he

heard that the vicar had another visitor; but it was too late. The housekeeper threw open the study door.

It looked even more dismal than usual, after the pleasantness of Ernthwaite Hall. The fire was out, and the room was both cold and close. Mr. Fielding had an air of being helpless and uncared for, which was painfully pathetic. His clothes were shabby and unbrushed; his hair long and disordered. His dim eyes were even dimmer, and his figure more shrunken than when his son left him. His visitor, Mr. Jackson, the vicar of Lockthwaite, was a broadly built, highcomplexioned man, of the unctuous, smug, muttonchop-whiskered type of parson. He had risen to go when Mr. Dale entered the study. His large voice and portly presence seemed to take up more than a third of the small room.

"Good-bye, my dear friend, good-bye!" he said, clasping Mr. Fielding's limit hand. "Do not trouble yourself to rise. Ah, here is Mr. Dale, just as we had finished our little talk about him!" He shook hands with the new-comer in a "Christian brotherly" manner, as might be expected from vicar to curate. Mr. Dale courteously returned with him to the front door. "Your vicar will no doubt tell you," Mr. Jackson said, pausing on the doorstep, "the subject of our talk. I felt it my duty to call and give him a word of warning against the dangerous tendency of

-

your views. As I told you yesterday, the texts alone of your two sermons have showed me the unsoundness of your theological tendencies, and I came to warn Mr. Fielding. My dear sir, may I not also warn you?"

"It would be useless. Naturally I chose my texts purposely, that they should strike the keynote of what will be my teaching here—or wherever I may have the opportunity."

Mr. Jackson shook his head solemnly. "I feared so—you are infected with the poisonous doctrine of trusting to good works, a doctrine fit only for civilised heathens. Mr. Dale, I endeavour to be charitable towards opponents, but I confess that I hold this worship of morality to be a fatal error."

"Well," Mr. Dale said, smiling, "we are all apt to think the views of those who differ from us fatal errors; but I hope we shall find many points of agreement, and ground for mutual help. If this was all you warned Mr. Fielding against, I hope I shall be able to reassure him."

"You treat it lightly—much too lightly. He, poor man! is too much absorbed in his literary work to enter into religious controversies."

"I should hardly think of pitying him for that," said the new curate.

"Because you do not feel the importance of combating the dangerous doctrines of this so-called Christian rationalism," said Mr. Jackson.

"Call it rational Christianity, Mr. Jackson, and I think you would dislike it less"—began Mr. Dale, but the other interrupted him—

"This is flippancy, sir, and on the most solemn subject. I am sorry to see that you are led away by these false lights;" and, shaking his head, Mr. Jackson departed.

The curate found his vicar irritated and perplexed. "What have I to do with your views? Why does Mr. Jackson come worrying me about your sermons? I thought I should have some peace when there was a curate to look after the parish, and I am sure that you are attending to all your duties most thoroughly. I had the highest testimonials with you. As for your orthodoxy, I really don't see that it is any affair of mine, or of Mr. Jackson's. The Bishop will see to that. So now, Mr. Dale, if you can postpone your business, I shall be very much obliged. I am specially engaged this evening." He fidgeted with his papers, and looked pathetically at the younger man.

Jonathan Dale explained his wishes as shortly as he could, but it seemed to him wrong to take the vicar's absent "Certainly, certainly, do exactly as you like!" as his consent to really important changes, and he tried to interest the old man in the matter. It was useless, however; and the curate was obliged to do as he thought best, leaving the vicar the mere name of authority. It would have been a pleasant position

for some men; but Mr. Dale was not young enough to enjoy power for its own sake, and did not wish to run the risk of making enemies for himself by sudden changes in the routine of parish matters. He was a man possessed by an unquenchable desire to put wrong things right whenever he came across them. Whether it was his business or not, when he saw a wrong thing, he wanted to give a hand towards putting it right. It was just because he had found it impossible to make terms with evil that his strength had been so ruthlessly spent in fighting it. He could never learn the limits of his own powers. He had spent his all; money, time, health. He had poured out his life like water, for what he thought the good of his fellow men; and he was not able to check the impulse now that he was driven out of the stress of battle, and found himself in this quiet nook. here there were wrongs to be righted; and he saw that he could not shield himself behind the vicar, but must act, and take the chance of unpopularity.

But, as it happened, it was not the reforms he introduced into parochial and school matters which raised up opposition to the new curate. That was only to be expected. What really took place might have been avoided by a little diplomacy. To begin with, as has been shown, he had shocked his neighbouring vicar, Mr. Jackson, and through him, the eldest Miss

Tyson, who had long been a pillar of the church in Ernthwaite.

In the next place, he grievously offended some influential Church supporters by going to lodge with Miss Owthwaite, the dressmaker, against whom no one had anything to say but that she was a Methodist. "One would a' thowt parson might give Church folk a turn; we might as well turn Methody at once if that's all the good going reg'lar to church does one," said Mrs. Gibson, who had hoped to get the curate to lodge with her.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Dale made no inquiry into Miss Owthwaite's religious tenets before he engaged her rooms. Her house was not far from the church, and on the high road which led to the lake and the station. He had been attracted by its neat appearance, and convenient situation; and when he called, and saw Miss Owthwaite, he was so struck with the quiet manner and sweet, serious face of the little hunchbacked woman, that he was glad to come to an arrangement with her at once.

Miss Jane Owthwaite had lived all her life in Ernthwaite. Her people had been farmers in the place for generations; she had still a brother in the old home. But she liked to be independent, and made a sufficient income by her business. The dressmaker herself always dressed with severe simplicity. She disapproved, on principle, of all

finery, frivolity and worldliness, but was gifted by nature with an artistic taste in the choice and arrangement of colours and materials, and a faculty for devising charming costumes. Her gifts would have been lamentably wasted in Ernthwaite, but for Gladys Tyson, who was an excellent customer. There was something incongruous in the sight of Miss Owthwaite's deformed figure and sallow face, surrounded by fripperies and flounces, silks and satins, fashion-plates and gay gowns. But she kept her religious opinions unchanged, allowed no worldly vanities to mitigate the puritanism of her own conduct, and was no less strict a dissenter because she was so good a dressmaker.

Mr. Dale had known nothing of her in either capacity when he went to lodge with her. Her expression of bravely endured pain, and the pathetic sweetness of her patient face, won his heart from the first moment, and they became fast friends.

Miss Owthwaite was soon heard to say that she could not think more highly of the curate if he were one of her own Methodist preachers. She believed that he had the gospel grace in his heart, and was a truly converted Christian—even though he was a clergyman, and did not talk about it as they did in chapel.

He was always gentle and polite to Miss Owthwaite, and in time she had to confess to herself that

the only thing which really troubled her about her lodger was that she could not see in what way she was specially called upon to pray for him. She could not discover that he was in captivity to any particular sin. She believed that he had "found grace." It was her greatest happiness to pray for those in whom she was interested; not vaguely, for their salvation or prosperity; but definitely, for this or that spiritual blessing. Owthwaite firmly believed that her prayers were of benefit to those for whom she prayed, and that the habit kept her own faith living and her own heart warm—as no doubt it did.

Besides vexing the Church people by taking lodgings with a dissenter, besides refusing to water down his religious views to please Mr. Jackson, Mr. Dale before long trod upon the tenderest susceptibilities of Mr. Smallman, and roused a wrath which years of warfare did not quell. In this case his political opinions gave offence; whereas everyone knows that curates have no right to have political opinions—especially opinions at variance with those of the richest man in the neighbourhood. Mr. Smallman—but Mr. Smallman is of too much consequence to be dragged in at the tail end of a chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS SMALLMAN, Esq., was a Manchester man, and when in Manchester gloried in the fact. He had large factories in Manchester; made his money, and enjoyed making it, in Manchester; went on "Change," and to a princely club in Manchester; and owned a showy house in one of the suburbs, where he spent most of his time.

He had inherited a large fortune from his father—who began life as a factory hand—and had been clever enough to increase it. To make money honestly, implies industry, cleverness (of a kind), self-denial (of a kind). These virtues Mr. Smallman possessed, besides others of a less useful order. Needless to say, he was a man held in high esteem by other commercial men, as well as by himself.

Shortly before the time when this little history opens, he had bought the estate of Dingle Hill, in the parish of Ernthwaite, adjoining the property of

Mrs. Sylvestre. Ever since he had been gradually putting off Manchester, and putting on Ernthwaite.

He had at first bought the place merely for the sake of the shooting, but had found other attractions also, and was determined to plant himself down as a country gentleman. He had enlarged the house; built greenhouses and new stables; raised high walls round the grounds; set up a steam launch on the lake, and generally manifested himself as a power in the land.

The idea had once occurred to Mr. Smallman that it would be a suitable episode in his personal history if he were to marry Judith Mordaunt. Such a connection would give him the status for which he yearned—that indefinable prestige in the county which not all the wealth of Manchester could buy. But Judith pointedly snubbed him, although she never dreamt of attributing to him such wild hopes concerning herself. She disliked the poor man to begin with, because he was not racy of the soil; and secondly, because she fancied he had an air of conferring patronage upon Ernthwaite by doing it the honour of residing at Dingle Hill.

It was thus she spoke of him in confidence to Mrs. Sylvestre: "I never felt so disagreeable towards anyone in my life. Of course I ought to be ashamed of being vicious about him, because he does not actually do anything to deserve it. I know he means to be inoffensive. If he were in love with me, I should be justified in hating him; but as it is Gladys, there is no excuse for me. He is such a rich, vulgar little man, and never can forget that he is rich! Do help me to abuse him, Cousin Mary, and then I shall calm down."

"I don't feel inclined to abuse Mr. Smallman," Mrs. Sylvestre answered; "but I am quite as much annoyed as you are at that screeching steam-launch of his. I suppose its voice reminds him pleasantly of Manchester, and people must be happy in their own way."

Judith's mention of Gladys Tyson referred to a fact which Mr. Smallman now wished to make clear to the world of Ernthwaite. Having given up all thought of Judith, he was seriously in love with the doctor's prettiest daughter,—the prettiest girl in the county, many folk maintained,—and he wooed her as ardently as love and money could woo.

Unfortunately, he was fifteen years older than Gladys, and did not take her fancy. She laughed at his affection and at his wealth; she intended to have a more romantic lover than Mr. Smallman some day. But she was too kind-hearted to snub him, and he did not despair. He believed in the omnipotence of money, and he believed in himself, and waited hopefully.

Mr. Smallman, like many other great people, had

two sides to his character; or rather, had the faculty of putting on two opposite characters—the Manchester man, and the Ernthwaite squire. In Manchester he was an advanced Radical, sustaining the part of a self-made son of the people, and fond of talking about equality.

He was like Sir Roger de Coverly, however, who was a stronger Tory in the country than in town. At Ernthwaite he was an enlightened Conservative; supported the authority of Church and Squirearchy; was uncompromising towards trespassers and poachers; and liked the girls to curtsey and the boys to touch their caps to him. At public meetings in Manchester he was eloquent about the rights of working men to the free use of libraries, museums, and so on, and indignant when any infringement of their privileges was attempted. At Ernthwaite his soul was grievously vexed by trespassers, and the cabalistic words "Private Property" were frequently on his lips.

One afternoon, soon after Mr. Dale's arrival, Mr. Smallman called at Ernthwaite Hall, and expressed himself bitterly about the annoyance he endured from trespassers.

"When a place is mine, it is mine," he said, with emphasis on the delightful possessive pronoun. "What right has anyone else to put a foot into my woods, if I say that the game is not to be

disturbed? Last night my new palings were broken in twelve places."

"Dear me! that is very provoking!" Mrs. Sylvestre said, with cheerful sympathy. "But I assure you, Mr. Smallman, your woods would be safer without the palings. If you will take down your notice-boards about trespassing, and leave gaps in your fences, no one will think it worth while to trespass. I soon found that the certain way to attract the village boys into my grounds was to put up a brand-new notice-board. The next day there was sure to be a breakage in the hedge or wall at that very spot."

"They must be taught differently, Mrs. Sylvestre. I don't intend to be trifled with. I shall not only put up notice-boards in my woods, but shall prosecute without fail those who refuse to obey the law."

"The woods have always been free here—always," said Judith, with defiance in her eye.

"Of course they are still free to you—to my personal friends," said Mr. Smallman. "But I will not countenance the practice people have of using short cuts through one's private property, without so much as a 'by your leave'!"

"But the people have a right to the short cuts; and there are so few to use them, that it can do no harm," the girl went on.

"Harm or not, I don't intend to allow it. If the

palings are broken again, I shall enclose the whole property with barbed wire "—

"Oh!" broke from Judith's lips, in a tone of unspeakable horror. "That wicked, cruel, abominable stuff! You could not do such a thing!"

Mr. Smallman laughed. "Lord Fitzhenry told me the other day, when he came over for a day's shooting, that he has put up miles of it. It is costly, but I shall certainly take measures to protect my private property at any cost."

A few days afterwards Judith and Mr. Dale met in the cottage of an old woman who lived at the farthest limits of the parish.

The curate had heard from her grand-daughter that the old dame was bedridden, and alone most of the day, so he deemed it his duty to pay her a visit.

He found, however, that she looked upon herself as anything but an object of compassion, or as one in need of spiritual advice. On the contrary, she was perfectly contented with the state of her soul, and only complained cheerily of the rheumatics in her bones. She took it kindly of him to call, to be sure, and would have no objection if he'd look in again, any time when he was passing her way. She had always been regular at church when she was not fast with the childer; tha had been all christened theer, and gone to Sunday school. And yes—he

might read her a chapter, or a bit of a prayer, if he liked; but she was hard of hearing, and he must speak up. No; she wanted nothing—thank him kindly all the same. The Lord was very good to her, and Miss Judith would be coming in a day or two with soup and eggs; the rheumatics were better and she was nicely to-day, and—

At this juncture Miss Judith and her well-filled basket appeared. The wrinkled old face was puckered into smiles of welcome; but after two or three minutes of friendly talk, Judith said that rain was coming on, and that she could not stay, but would walk back to Ernthwaite with Mr. Dale.

"I can show you the shortest and the nicest way," she said. "I suppose you came by the road. So did I, because I had other places to call at. But I will take you one of the prettiest walks we have."

They turned off the high road down a narrow lane, and soon reached a gate which led into the woods. Judith stood still.

"Well!" she exclaimed, in a voice breathing fire and fury. "What next, I wonder!"

For the gate, instead of yielding to her push, was padlocked, and "Trespassers will be prosecuted," in clear white letters on a black board, stared her in the face.

The next moment Judith was over the gate. Mr. Dale found it impossible not to laugh as she poured

forth a torrent of indignation against the iniquity of daring to close this path.

"It has never been closed, never! and he has no right to do it; and if he had, it is horrid of him! wish I could have broken off his padlock, and pulled down his notice-board! I hope he will prosecute me for trespassing, and then we shall see what right he has to close this way. It cuts off a mile between the village and Mrs. Robinson's cottage, and it has always been used. I wish Manchester people would stay in Manchester! No one wants them here; and they don't understand that owning woods and hills is not the same thing as owning a villa and garden. can't lock everyone out of the woods. Mr. Dale, why do you laugh at me? You can't think he is right!"

There was still a twinkle in Mr. Dale's eyes, but he answered gravely, "Not morally right, I should think, from what you say. Who is the owner?"

- "Mr. Smallman. You must have heard of him."
- "Yes, I remember. He subscribes largely to the schools, and choir, and "—
- "Oh, of course," Judith interrupted. "His money may be useful in a poor little place like this, and I don't deny that he gives liberally enough. But that is no reason for excusing an injustice like this. It is an insult to all of us to close an old path and put a padlock on the gate! It is nothing to laugh about!"

"I assure you there is not the ghost of a laugh in my thoughts. But"—

"There is no 'but' about it. I must get this path opened again. I will have that padlock taken off."

"Miss Mordaunt, you will make matters worse if you enter upon steps of that nature, unless you are perfectly certain that there is a legal right-of-way through this wood. Do you know as a fact that there is?"

"How can I know anything about the legality of it? And what has that to do with the question? Mr. Smallman has simply taken upon himself to close it for the sake of his game, and to show that it is private property! It is grossly unjust—legal or not! We have always had a right to use this path. It saves the children coming to school, and the labourers coming to work, at least a mile. And it is one of our prettiest walks. You can't think he is right to close it?"

"I don't think so for a moment. It seems to me harsh and high-handed. I'm always sorry for the long distances farm-labourers often have to walk. Don't you think Mr. Smallman might be persuaded to open it?"

"No," Judith said. "He is very anxious to show to the world that he is lord and master of a few acres of land. I believe he is delighted to put this padlock

on the gate. Oh, it must come off! What can be done?"

"I will make inquiries about it. If he has not a legal right to close the path, of course we can compel him to open it."

"Oh, do help me!" Judith pleaded. "I can't find out about the law, and Mrs. Sylvestre hates any disputes. Now, I rather like fighting. Don't you?"

Mr. Dale smiled as he said, "You forget that I am the servant of the Prince of Peace. But I hold that it is part of my business 'to help the simple folk to their right,' and I will see what can be done."

"I'm so glad. If you will help, I am sure we shall get it open again," Judith said.

So the curate entered into a league against the richest man in his parish, and was very happy. Judith's temper had quite calmed down when she felt sure of his sympathy and co-operation, and she began to flit about the wood, gathering a spray of coloured leaves or a bunch of berries, calling his attention to this and that, and thoroughly enjoying every step of the way, as was her wont. Presently their talk lighted upon the old vicar.

"I am very uncomfortable about Mr. Fielding," the curate said. "It seems to me, from the little I have seen so far, that his health is failing rapidly, and that he has few of even the most necessary comforts about

him. He is so lonely and uncared for. I can't help wishing that his son could be sent for. He has very little attention from his housekeeper. Of course, as a stranger, I cannot interfere. I am afraid I am too fond of interfering. But I thought that Mrs. Sylvestre"—

"She has tried," Judith interrupted, "and she cannot do anything. Dr. Tyson has done his best, too. His housekeeper will not be dismissed; and Mr. Fielding does not see that there is anything wrong, and dislikes interference. It has made us very unhappy. Of course, when Geoffrey Fielding was at home,—or coming home now and then,—the woman was obliged to keep things fairly comfortable. Now there is no one in the house but herself and the old vicar; and she does just as she likes."

"Why did Mr. Fielding's son leave him?" Mr. Dale asked. "It seems to me unnatural for an only son to leave his father when he was so helpless. I know nothing of the circumstances, and therefore have no right to blame him; but"—

"Oh no; Geoffrey was not a bit to blame," Judith broke in eagerly. "He had a good opportunity of going abroad, and wanted to find an opening for himself, because he could not live as a burden on his father. And Mr. Fielding was quite willing for him to go."

"Yet I think he wants a son at his side now, Miss

Mordaunt; a son to bear the burden of the father's weakness, not to be a burden. From casual words he has said to me, I think Mr. Fielding misses his son sadly. Lately, I believe, he has not even heard from him. Do you think he is likely to come home soon? Was there not some promise"—

Again Judith interrupted. "Not exactly a promise. Geoffrey meant to come, if he could, in two years. It is two years and four months since he went away. But many things may have prevented his writing, or coming. And of course he cannot know how much more his father needs him now. Mr. Fielding does not write much to Geoffrey, I am sure."

"That is exactly what I was thinking," Mr. Dale said. "It is no business of mine, and I ought not to interfere; but it seems to me cruel that the son should not be told of his father's condition. Do you not think it would be a kindness if you, or one of his old friends, sent him word, and asked him to come home?"

He was startled when he saw the bright blush which rose to Judith's cheek as she answered, "I will ask Mrs. Sylvestre. Yes; he ought to come."

Mr. Dale never forgot that walk. When they had passed through Mr. Smallman's wood, they came out upon a hillside, broken here and there by a straggling bit of copse, but gradually merging into open ground,

the path winding among bracken and heather, as it ascended.

Judith was a delightful companion. She enjoyed each detail of the way with as fresh delight as though she had been a prisoner "in crowded city pent," and was out for a brief holiday. She loved every spot with the tenderness of long familiarity; she knew just where to look for this and that wild-flower, and where to expect to see the various birds and creatures of wood and mountain. There was not the least approach to either artistic or poetical feeling in her observance of "No, I do not sketch," she said, in answer nature. to Mr. Dale's question. "I never could do anything but caricature beautiful things. So I am content just to look at them and love them."

She did not moralise about the fading leaves, nor draw lessons from the dainty blossoms she was so quick to discover, nor seem to care for the ideas they symbolised. In springtime, she did not want a primrose to be "anything more" than a primrose. She loved it just because it was a primrose, and had intense joy in the mere sweetness and loveliness of all common flowers. Everything delighted her; she seemed the friend of everything that lived or grew.

"Ah, yes! I thought there would be one or two yellow poppies left," she cried, scrambling over a broken bit of wall beyond the wood to gather the flowers which Mr. Dale would have passed unseen. "Aren't

till the very end of summer. Hush! don't move! It is such fun to watch the rabbits scurry across this opening and into the copse. There they go, whisking their little white tails! . . . You darling!" This, not to her companion, but to a saucy little squirrel, which skipped up an oak tree and from branch to branch, as they came near, finally resting, when far enough to feel secure, and chattering noisily, as he looked down at them with his bright eyes.

The short cut, with all these interruptions, took almost as long as the road; but Mr. Dale thought it had much to recommend it, and was sorry when, after crossing and descending the open hill, and passing through a half cleared wood where the charcoalburners had been at work, they came into a fieldpath, and in two minutes more, stood still at a stone boundary wall, in which steps were roughly built, and looked down upon Ernthwaite, close below them. Judith never stood here without thinking of Geoffrey. She was silent, as they paused with one accord and gazed at the scene. The rain had kept off, but the day was still and sombre. There was no mist; the distance was wonderfully distinct; and in the clear grey light all the rich tones of autumn colouring were intense in depth and fulness.

"This is the spell of your home," Mr. Dale said
—"this quiet beauty of mingled woodland and

hillside; the warmth of colour; the tender homeliness of outline; the peaceful suggestiveness of happy homesteads; the blue smoke wreaths above the trees. There are plenty of grander landscapes; but I think it is this aspect of nature which most lays hold upon one's heart, and becomes one of the precious elements of life. You are right, Miss Mordaunt. Your Ernthwaite, with its fells, and woods, and becks, is very beautiful!"

She looked at him with shining eyes. "I could not put it into words, but that is what I feel too. I am so glad you like my Ernthwaite!"

They crossed the wall, and came to the spot where Geoffrey and Judith had parted.

"You will easily find your way now," she said. "I go to the left—to the Hall; you must follow the path to the village. Good-bye; and, Mr. Dale, please don't forget to find out about the right-of-way."

He was not allowed to forget it; for the next day one of the boys came to school late, and told how Mr. Smallman's keeper had caught him in the Dingle Hill wood, turned him back, and threatened to thrash him if he found him there again. Considerable indignation was expressed by the villagers; but they were powerless, and Mr. Dale felt that Mr. Smallman must be opposed, at all costs.

Time passed; but the curate's mind was full of the subject; and one Sunday, a few weeks later, he preached on the Golden Rule, commenting on the belief often held by rich men of their absolute *right* to subject their poorer fellowmen to inconvenience or discomfort. Whereas, he maintained, all legal rights ought to be entirely under the control of the higher Law, given once for all in the words: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you."

That afternoon, as he came out of the schools, Mr. Dale found Gladys and Judith waiting for him.

"I've been longing to say 'Hear, hear!' to the sermon this morning!" Judith began. "It was so plucky of you when the great Potentate himself sat listening. I saw that he writhed with vexation because he could not stand up and answer you."

"But he answered you—in the most unanswerable manner—after church, in our drawing-room," laughed Gladys. "You would have been utterly crushed if you had heard him."

"Perhaps one of you will kindly tell me what you mean," Mr. Dale said, looking from one to the other.

"We mean Mr. Smallman, of course. Tell us what he said, Gladys?" Judith said.

"I cannot do justice to his eloquent wrath. He said that if a clergyman considered it his duty to incite peaceable people to envy their superiors and to break the law, he did not. Oh, Mr. Dale, you have made an enemy to-day. Mr. Smallman means

to leave the church, and to withdraw his subscriptions and everything."

"I am very sorry to hear all this," and there was a look of distress on the curate's face. "I did not know that Mr. Smallman was in church, or I might have expressed myself otherwise, though I did not say a word which I could withdraw. I will see him to-morrow and try to explain my meaning."

"Don't give in to him," Judith cried, "about the path, at all events. We are allies, remember. You are bound to fight it out now. Oh, I do love to hear the truth spoken out without mincing! If you have made an enemy, you have made a friend too."

And she put her hand into his with a smile which scattered to the winds the curate's compunctions at having hurt anybody's feelings.

Perhaps Judith Mordaunt was dangerously honest, as Mrs. Sylvestre often told her, in the expression of her likes and dislikes. Perhaps it was unkind to be so frankly kind in word and look to those whom she deemed her friends. At all events, it was natural enough that Jonathan Dale should think a good deal of his fair ally, and that waking dreams—new to him—should steal into his mind, and brighten all existence into strange blissfulness.

## CHAPTER VII

THE next day Jonathan Dale determined to see Mr. Smallman, and explain to him that the sermon had not been meant as an offence. He hated a quarrel. On his way to Dingle Hill, he met Gladys and Judith and Mr. Smallman, all carrying skates, for a spell of severe frost had set in.

"I was on my way to see you, Mr. Smallman," the curate said, when greetings had been exchanged.

Frederick Augustus drew himself up loftily. "I regret to have missed the honour of your visit."

"I can say what I wanted just as well now, if you will let me join you." Mr. Dale looked at the girls, and Judith said—

"We are going down to the lake to see if the ice will bear at this end. Come with us."

She and Gladys walked on, and the two men followed. Mr. Smallman had been making himself agreeable to the young ladies, and was annoyed at the interruption.

"Were you going to call for some subscription?" he said. "I always send when they are due. You need not"—

"It wasn't for a subscription," the curate said. "I wanted to explain that I was not preaching at you yesterday"—

"That was certainly my impression, Mr. Dale."

"It would seem to me a mean advantage to take of my position. A parson can't be answered when he is in the pulpit, and I should never dream of attacking anyone personally from that place."

"Oh, don't apologise! Don't think for a moment that your sermon had any weight with me. My actions are not to be changed by any man's preaching," said Mr. Smallman, with irritation.

"I want to assure you that my sermon was not spoken at you, Mr. Smallman. I did not know you were in church."

"It was of no consequence," began the injured landlord, "personally, of no consequence at all. But I regretted to hear such rank socialism from a pulpit for the sake of your poorer parishioners. You were inciting them to discontent with social distinctions, and to disregard of law. I do not consider that is the duty of a clergyman."

"I cannot begin to argue now the question of what socialism is," said the curate. "But I believe that part of every clergyman's duty is to help his poorer parishioners to maintain their rights, and to teach them how that can be done. I wish we could see this question of the foot-path through your property in the same light, Mr. Smallman. I shall be very sorry if it leads to unpleasantness. But if the people have always had a right to use it, they ought not to consent to be deprived of their right."

- "You allow that the property is mine?"
- "Certainly."
- "Then I shall do as I like with it. What I choose to do is to preserve the game in my woods. I do not believe that a right-of-way ever existed through those woods, and I shall not allow the public to use the foot-path, and disturb the game."
- "Have you thought seriously of the great hardship it is to the labourers to increase, by at least a mile, the distance they have to walk to and from work?"
- "They must get work nearer home, then. My property is not to suffer, surely, to save one or two working men a little extra walk."
- "Mr. Smallman, is your game of more value than the lives of working men?"
  - "Rubbish! their lives are not in question."
- "Time lost and unnecessary fatigue is an injury to their lives," Mr. Dale said gravely. "I wish I could persuade you to imagine yourself in a labourer's place

for a moment, weary with the day's work, and sent a mile out of the direct way home, in order not to risk disturbing a rich man's game."

"Mr. Dale, I decline to listen to this cant," broke out Mr. Smallman. "I am determined to maintain my right to do as I choose with my own private property. It won't be worth while owning property at all, if this kind of thing is to go on. I shall prosecute anyone found using the path through the Dingle Hill woods."

"I am very sorry," Mr. Dale said. "Then we shall be obliged to see if the old right-of-way can be established legally."

"What? You mean to defy me?"

"I mean to defend the public right—if it is a right," said the poor curate.

"Very well; do your worst," said the rich man.

They had reached the lake. The girls stood still, and Mr. Smallman turned to Gladys.

"I am afraid the ice is rotten, Miss Gladys. There is no one skating, and the snow has spoiled it. We must content ourselves with a walk, instead of skating."

"I suppose it really is not safe?" she said, standing at the edge, and poking the tip of her foot on the ice. Mr. Smallman stopped her.

"I beg you not to attempt it," he cried anxiously.

"I hope you are not making peace with the

enemy," Judith said to the curate, as the others moved a few paces away.

"I wish there could be peace," he answered, "without sacrifice of principle. I have a dread of quarrels."

"Oh, I have not," Judith said cheerfully. "It is rather amusing—especially when you are in the right. Can't you skate?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you bring your skates, then? I'm sure you may give yourself an hour's holiday. It is superhuman"—

He interrupted her, laughing. "There will be no skating for anyone to-day. More snow is coming, and the ice is rotten and unsafe, as Mr. Smallman says."

"He is timid, and knows nothing about it. Do go for your skates, and you and I will show them."

Perhaps she did it for mischief. The man could hardly help showing that it was a delight to him to be near her.

She stepped lightly on the ice, and advanced a step or two.

"It is not safe. Come back, Miss Mordaunt," Mr. Dale said authoritatively. "It is folly to risk even a wetting, for no good. See how rotten it is." He pushed his stick into the ice, which broke up easily.

Judith came back to the bank when he spoke. "Are you nervous too?" she said, with a shade of

contempt in her voice. "Are you afraid that you might get wet in dragging me out if the ice broke?"

"I hate foolhardiness," he said quietly. "Anyone can see that this ice might give way any moment, and if you had been far from the bank"—

"Oh," Gladys cried, interrupting him, "there are people on the ice—ever so far—just round that point. They are children—sliding and playing. Are they safe?"

"No. If one fell, I expect there would be a hole made," Mr. Smallman said. "How thoughtless children are!"

"I will run round by the bank and tell them to come off," Judith said.

"It is a long way round. You can't pass the fences. That comes of having no free foreshore to our lakes," muttered the curate, looking anxiously at the three small figures, whose laughing voices, as they chased one another across the glassy surface of the lake, reached their ears.

He shouted. "Come back, children, at once! The ice isn't safe! Come back!" The children either did not hear, or would not heed.

Mr. Smallman looked uncomfortable, and Gladys turned white.

"Is it really dangerous?" she asked.

"Very. They must be brought off at once," said the curate, as he stepped cautiously upon the swaying ice.

"Oh, don't go if it isn't safe," Gladys cried.

He did not even look back, but walked on quickly and carefully towards the children, calling to them at the same time. When they saw who it was, they ran towards him. He made them walk cautiously, for the water was deep and the ice completely rotten. sent one boy and girl first, to distribute the weight. and they reached the shore safely, though the ice was so much broken that the water was flowing over it. Mr. Dale held the third child by the hand, and made the best speed he could; but all at once the child slipped and fell, screaming with terror as she felt the cold water about her. He dragged the little thing out of the hole, lifted her into his arms, and ran. They were safe,—for the lake was shallow now,—but the ice gave way at every step, and he was wet above his knees. The whole thing was over in two minutes.

"Where does she live? Who knows? She ought to be taken home at once, for she is wet through, poor little mite," Mr. Dale said.

"Give her to me. I know her, and will run home with her," said Judith eagerly.

As he put the frightened child into her arms, he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"It was splendid," she said; "I know now what the difference is between foolhardiness and heroism."

Mr. Dale's teeth were chattering, and he looked a

very unromantic hero at that moment. "I'll run home too," he said, "and get off these wet things."

Gladys was white and trembling. "I will send father to you," she said. "You may take cold. Oh, Mr. Dale, how brave it was!"

"Nonsense," he said, laughing. "I want no doctor. I am only a little damp, so I'll 'make tracks' and get into dry clothes as fast as I can."

He ran awkwardly, and Mr. Smallman thought he had never seen a more absurd object than the poor curate, his thin trousers and long coat clinging to his not very finely-shaped legs, his face blue, his nose and eyes red. He glanced complacently at his own neat legs in their gorgeous stockings and knickerbockers.

"I'm glad nothing worse than a wetting happened to him. You will take cold standing so long, Miss Gladys," he said. "I hope you will let me have the pleasure of our promised walk, or shall we go and meet Miss Mordaunt?"

"I am going home. I don't want to go for a walk now. I was frightened. Suppose he—they—had been drowned before our eyes!"

"There was not much fear."

"You said there was, when I wanted to go on the ice."

"Naturally I am anxious where *your* safety is concerned." His voice was tender, and Gladys took fright.

"Good-morning. Please don't turn back with me. I am going home at once." She shook hands, and tripped away.

Miss Owthwaite's cottage had to be passed before she could reach home. Gladys ran up the garden path and knocked. Miss Owthwaite came to the door.

"Is he all right?" Gladys said. "Are you sure I need not send father to see him?"

Miss Owthwaite smiled. "You mean Mr. Dale? Oh, he's all right, Miss Gladys. He's changing his things, and I'm getting him some hot tea. He says I should make a splendid nurse."

"We were so frightened. Wasn't it brave of him to go for the children?" Gladys said.

"What children? He didn't tell me. I thought it was just that you'd all been amusing yourselves, and I've been scolding him."

Gladys told her story.

"Eh, God bless him! It's just like him. He thinks no more of himself than my thimble," the dressmaker ejaculated.

Reassured about the curate, Gladys went home. "Dear me!" she reflected; "what an odd and perplexing world this is! I wish Mr. Dale was the owner of Dingle Hill, and that Mr. Smallman was the curate. Even that would not make it come right, for we all seem to be at sixes and sevens. I know Judith cares still for Geoffrey, and is always thinking

of him now, and hoping he will come back. Anyone can see that Mr. Dale likes Judith better than the rest of us—so far. I like him—I can't help it. He is so good, and there's something— Oh dear, and then Mr. Smallman means to propose to me, I know he does—and I can't help that either. What a puzzle it is! I wonder how it will all end. Somebody must be left out in the cold."

## CHAPTER VIII

"I shall test him for myself, this evening," Beatrice Tyson said to her sisters. "His sermons are too vague, and he always evades the crucial points of doctrine. But I am convinced, whatever father may say, that his views are *not* sound. This evening I shall take an opportunity of testing him."

"What a shame! can't you let the poor man alone even when he comes out for an evening's entertainment?" Gladys said. "I do hate worrying so about 'views.' As if it were of the smallest consequence to you, now, about Mr. Dale's sermons!"

"Of course I care just as much for the spiritual welfare of this parish, as before my engagement," Beatrice answered with dignity. "Besides, dangerous opinions spread rapidly; and Mr. Jackson says"—

"Oh, I don't care two buttons what Mr. Jackson—good, excellent man—says, so long as I haven't to listen to him. Don't be cross, Beatrice, but I can't stand forty minutes' sermons."

"I am sorry you are so flippant, Gladys. You get worse instead of better, and seriously"—

"Seriously, just look if this trimming is straight," Gladys interrupted once more. "I can't see at the back of the skirt."

The girls were in the old schoolroom. Beatrice was making up packages of tracts; Winifred was at her easel; Muriel at her desk; Gladys was trimming a gown, which she now slipped over her head, then danced round before Beatrice, and begged her, seriously, to put the trimming straight.

"It is quite straight, as far as I can tell," Beatrice said. "You think too much about dress;" and she went on folding tracts.

"No, it isn't straight. Come here, Gladys," Muriel said quietly, from her corner. "It is such a pretty gown, it ought to be right." She laid aside her pen, and began to arrange the loops of ribbon carefully.

"Thank you! Yes, isn't it pretty? Miss Owthwaite and I devised it entirely out of our own inner consciousnesses. And dress is important. Ruskin says a girl's first duty is to look nice—doesn't he? I tore the trimming the other evening; and I want to look quite too fascinating to-night!"

"Why? there's nobody coming for you to fascinate. Mr. Smallman fell a victim long ago; and Mr. Dale is quite old and impossible." "Oh yes; he is quite impossible," Gladys echoed, but there was a quick blush upon her fair face.

"There he is," Winifred said, who was near the window, "rushing along in his shabby soft hat, and long coat, and with his head down, as usual. He never thinks of looking up. I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Dale is a most uninteresting man!"

Having delivered her opinion in these terms of finality, Winifred went on with her study of still life. The chief subject was a ginger pot, while an orange flanked by a bit of faded brocade, lent by Mrs. Sylvestre, created the spot of brilliance, explained by Winifred as necessary to her "scheme of colour." This remarkably original design had occupied Winnie for a week of indoor weather; and though she was rather tired of it, and found the orange more unmanageable than she had expected, she stuck to her task heroically.

"He does not seem to have the very least appreciation of art," the young artist continued. "The other day, father brought him up here to look for some old book they had been speaking of, and I was at work. And all he could say was, 'Oh yes! an orange. It is very like I'm sure.' Stupid! Of course it was like!"

A peal of laughter from Muriel and Gladys in no wise disconcerted Winnie. She was accustomed to be laughed at, and bore it with the calm self-assurance of conscious genius.

"Do you call a man interesting who could not make a more sensible speech than that when he looked at my work? I cannot think what father sees in him to like so much."

"He has read a great deal, for one thing," Muriel answered; "I am sure, in his sermons he quotes all the poets that ever were. But father says it is the man himself he likes. He is so thoroughly good."

"Oh, but goodness isn't a bit interesting," Winnie retorted. "And it is easy enough to quote poetry. You never heard of him writing any."

"He has more sense, I should hope," Gladys said.
"Thank you, Muriel. Now I shall look 'fetching' (don't be shocked, Beatrice. I won't say it before anyone), and that is a melancholy satisfaction, even when there is no one to fetch."

"Gladys! you are a terrible flirt. Take care you don't meet the fate of flirts in general, and lose your own heart."

"No fear! I'll take care of my heart," the girl said, shaking her pretty head; but once more the traitor blush flew to her cheeks and throat.

The evening's entertainment at "Nineteenth Century Villa" was to be given in honour of Beatrice Tyson's engagement to Mr. Jackson; an event which the sharp-eyed sisters had long foreseen, but which had only just been announced to an interested world. It was what is called a "suitable" match, in every

way; and everyone expressed a mild wonder why the parties chiefly concerned had not thought of it sooner. But Mr. Jackson was a man of deliberately moving mind. He had only been vicar of Lockthwaite for three years; and he had two sisters living with him who supplied him with the feminine admiration and society for which most men crave, and entirely understood his tastes in the way of diet and domestic arrangements. He had therefore not much to gain by matrimony, and had long looked upon it askance, as a snare and a lottery; as a pill, in fact, which, unless gilded by a considerable amount of gold, it would be unwise for him to swallow. Beatrice Tyson had no money; she was not beautiful; was past the fascinating years of girlhood; and evinced less awestruck admiration of his merits than did his two sisters: and yet, he was engaged to be married to her, and felt complacently proud as he received the congratulations of his friends. The explanation of the phenomenon must be that Beatrice had decided. from the first moment of Mr. Jackson's arrival at Lockthwaite, that she would not refuse him if he proposed to her.

Beatrice's sisters were very much pleased. Girls are always pleased at the prospect of a marriage; and the well-meant rule of Beatrice over the family had been sometimes calculated to create insubordination. It would be distinctly a relief, in some respects,

to throw off the yoke of Beatrice. There was a new element of gaiety, therefore, in the air that evening. Mrs. Tyson provided an excellent supper, and the girls excellent music. Gladys sang and Muriel played with more than average skill.

"You ought to be very proud of your daughters!" Mrs. Sylvestre (who had been persuaded to accompany Judith to do special honour to the newly engaged couple) said to her friend, Dr. Tyson.

"They do very well—as girls go nowadays," he said, with a proud smile.

By and by the doctor found himself near Judith.

"Oh, you can come and speak to me at last!" she said reproachfully. "When Cousin Mary comes here with me, I never get a word or a look thrown at me."

He laughed heartily. "Well, it's quite true, my dear—I do like and always did like to monopolise the prettiest woman in the room, if it doesn't happen to be my own wife. It confers a sort of distinction upon a man, and makes all the other fellows jealous."

"You are a very wicked old gentleman! You dare not say that to Mr. Jackson!" she said.

Dr. Tyson shrugged his shoulders as he glanced towards his future son-in-law, who at this moment was sitting a little apart, his legs crossed comfortably, and a smile on his countenance, surreptitiously munching pieces of a plumcake which stood on a table at his elbow. Refreshments are a running accompaniment to north-country evening parties.

"There is no accounting for tastes," the doctor said. "But I think you must be a little disappointed yourself, Judith! You speak bitterly, and you are not brilliant this evening!"

"How can I be? It takes two to produce brilliance. You can't strike a match upon nothing. And I am at a discount. Your girls absorb all the attention, and I am reduced to the albums," she said, laughing with perfect good-nature.

"Between you and me, Smallman makes a goose of himself," the doctor whispered. "Gladys won't look at him—stuck-up little piece that she is! I wonder if she is waiting for a prince of the blood to fall in love with her blue eyes. But there is Mr. Dale left, Judith. What a dear fellow he is! I feel as if I had known him for years."

"Yes—so do I," Judith answered.

At that moment Gladys began to sing again. Muriel played for her; and Mr. Smallman stood at the piano to turn over the music, but his little black eyes were fixed upon the fair singer instead, and he was never ready to attend to his self-imposed duty. His dapper figure was clad in a faultlessly correct evening suit. His hands were white, and on one shone a costly diamond; his features were neat if uninteresting, and his hair and moustache glossy

black and well-trimmed. Altogether Mr. Smallman was ornamental, though he was to be classed among those men who look better in a drawing-room than out of doors. He watched Gladys with evident approval throughout her song, and thanked her effusively when it ended.

But Gladys turned him over to Muriel, and crossed the room to Judith and her father.

"I can't think how you two can sit gossiping here," she said, "and see unmoved the prolonged torture of that poor martyr! Beatrice has pinned Mr. Dale into a corner for ten mortal minutes. He will never come out to tea again if we don't put a stop to this. Come, Judith, and we will deliver him."

Mr. Dale rose eagerly as the girls approached.

"Excuse me, Miss Tyson, but that is a question to which a hundred answers might be given, and not one of them say all the truth. You must let me thank Miss Gladys for her song."

"Beatrice, we want you to help Winnie to start the new game you saw the other evening," Gladys said, and Beatrice was driven from the field.

Later in the evening Mr. Smallman had a few minutes' talk with Judith. "I want to speak to you about that foot-path," he began. "You cannot understand, I am sure, the serious mischief that is caused by inciting the lower orders to question the rights of the owners of property to do as they choose with

what is unquestionably their own. I am quite sure that you do not understand the principle which is at stake. It is the principle I mean to fight for, if "—

"And I also!" Judith interposed. "I know there is a principle at stake."

He smiled pityingly. "You mean some vague, abstract thing called justice? You are quite misled by Mr. Dale. I assure you, Miss Mordaunt, that the principle of respecting the rights of property is the most sacred guarantee of order and peace. There is nothing vague or abstract about this, and I mean to abide by it. I am very sorry to come into collision with my neighbours, and, of course, I shall be glad to give you a key of the gate to the Dingle Hill wood."

"Thank you," Judith said, very sweetly; "that is most kind of you. But the gate is quite easy to get over. The gate is no impediment to me. As you say, it is the principle of the thing to which I object, not the gate."

Mr. Smallman restrained his tongue with difficulty. Judith was Gladys Tyson's friend, and he wished to conciliate her. "You have been infected with our new curate's specious phrases, I am afraid," he said. "But you will surely see, when you consider, how false his position is; and that I am justified in maintaining my right to close that path."

"It was I who asked Mr. Dale to defend our right to use the path," the girl said,

"He ought to have known better than to take up such a matter to defend. Nothing can excuse a clergyman who uses his pulpit as a political platform, and preaches flat socialism."

"It is your turn, Mr. Smallman, and you are to be my partner," came the voice of his charmer to soothe Mr. Smallman's irritation, and Gladys and he went out of the room according to the rules of the game, while some word was fixed upon by the rest of the company. So his wrath was turned away, and the round game went on merrily. Supper was served at ten o'clock; then there was more music. Tyson sang "Simon the Cellarer," and "The Vicar of Bray." Mrs. Tyson declared, with her usual sweet smile, that if her husband had only devoted more time to music, he would have been a famous singer. In her opinion, he had the finest voice in the county Everyone had heard her say the same thing each time the doctor sang, and no one ever contradicted her.

Mr. Jackson's two sisters spent an hour bending over the newest drawing - room puzzle, until their heads ached. Then they laughed at the round game, and at Dr. Tyson's blunders over it, until their sides ached; and when they went home, declared that they had spent a delightful evening.

It was moonlight, and Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith walked home, accompanied by the curate. On the

way Judith told him that Mrs. Sylvestre had written to Geoffrey Fielding, urging him to come home.

"Of course he will come," she said, "if he gets the letter, and if he can come. He could not be unkind. I do hope he will come!"

Neither Mrs. Sylvestre nor Mr. Dale echoed the girl's wish. When the curate saw the expression on her face, and heard the ring of her voice in that eager "I do hope," his heart sank. It had been his own suggestion that Geoffrey should be summoned home. But he knew that Geoffrey's return would be the end of his dream.

"I have been thinking a great deal about poor Geoffrey this evening," Judith said, when Mr. Dale had left the ladies at the Hall gate, and they went slowly up the avenue, passing from black bands of shadow into white patches of moonlight.

"Have you?" Mrs. Sylvestre said, in her most unsympathetic tones.

"I seemed to miss him so much, just as I did when he first went away. How he used to laugh at our Ernthwaite parties!... I wonder if he will bring a wife back with him? There are not many changes among us. Beatrice will soon be married, and Gladys might be"—

"Are there no possible changes but marriage? You silly girls always look upon that as 'the one

far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves."

Judith laughed. "Well, marriage or death are our only events."

"Choose the latter, if you have any choice," said Mrs. Sylvestre, as she stood for an instant on the steps, the moonlight full upon her cold, beautiful face.

Neither Mr. Dale nor Mrs. Sylvestre need have been troubled about Geoffrey Fielding. Weeks passed, and no answer came to Mrs. Sylvestre's letter, and no Geoffrey appeared at Ernthwaite. Judith used often to look very wistful in those days; and in the dusk of the winter afternoons would pace up and down the terrace walk on the hillside above Ernthwaite Hall, and taste over again the bitterness of deferred hope and despised love.

Winter passed, with its usual small gaieties and interests. Beatrice Tyson was married. Mr. Smallman continued his wooing, but unsuccessfully. The foot-path dispute grew; for Mr. Dale found, on investigation, that there was a public right-of-way through the Dingle Hill wood. Mr. Smallman found, on investigation, that there was not. The law, therefore, would have to decide between the disputants.

Winter melted into spring. Still Geoffrey gave no sign, and Judith could only make up to the vicar by such small attentions as he would permit, for the absence of his son. One March morning the old man was found dead in bed. It made little difference in the parish, for he had almost lived in his study; and Mrs. Sylvestre without hesitation appointed the curate in his place.

So Jonathan Dale took possession of the pretty old vicarage, sheltered by its sycamores from the north, and divided by the garden from the churchyard; with a merry little beck falling from the fells down its rocky bed through the garden to join the river; and felt that, could but his dream come true, he would be already in paradise.

Dreams, unhappily, have a trick of going by the rule of contrary.

## CHAPTER IX

"It's all very well to preach to me now, old fellow. But I'd like to put a question to you. If anyone had jawed you about steady work, and the folly of wasting time, and so on, twenty years ago, would it have made the least impression? Wasn't there an irrepressible desire in your soul to break out of the dull, decent little parish you found yourself born into, and discover, on your own account, the dangerous delights of the outside world, which everyone warned you against? Wasn't it impossible for you to be content with that state of life, etc.? Confess!"

"Impossible—more's the pity. I could not sit still and be a good boy—not for all the cakes and ale in England. But it would have been better for me if I had, all the same."

"I tell you, Dalton, it's no use fighting against nature. When nature says, 'There's lots of fun, and a spice of danger, just outside, my lad. You have legs, use them!' off we go, and get fun out of the

danger itself, and have our fling, and waste our substance, and all the rest of it; and then "—

"And then waken up to find that we've ruined our own lives, and brought misery upon those who had a right to look to us for comfort, by our confounded folly," interrupted the other speaker.

He was a man who looked older than his years; his handsome face was marred by a long course of reckless living; his expression was haggard, and the dark eyes were just now grave almost to gentleness.

Geoffrey Fielding interested him; and somehow or other he wanted to show his best side to the young man who was so sanguine about life, and still so simple in his enjoyment of adventures which had long lost their charm for Philip Dalton.

Geoffrey had not changed much since he left Ernthwaite. He had grown broader and manlier, and was sunburnt; his clear, bright eyes, close-curling brown hair, and the ready smile which showed the white, even teeth, made him pleasant and wholesome to look upon. He was not remarkably handsome; merely one of the hundreds of well-born, well-bred young Englishmen, who may be met any day, in all corners of the globe, whose general aspect gives one the consoling assurance that the decadence of England will probably be postponed for a generation or two.

It was in a wooden shanty of the city of C——— (at that time the westernmost settlement on the great Pacific Railway) that the two men sat and conversed. They had each an American lounging-chair. A table stood between them, and upon it a lighted lamp, a heap of torn papers, a thick leathern pocket-book, a tobacco-pouch and jar, pipes and fragments of pipes, and various odds and ends—nails, screws, bits of string. Up and down the bare room stood boxes and packing-cases, some ready closed, others apparently waiting for the final fastening down. Everything spoke of a general turn-out, and preparations for departure.

Philip Dalton was, in fact, on the eve of quitting C——, where he had been lucky enough two years before to open one of the earliest stores, and, for the first time in his life, to make money in a systematic and legitimate manner.

So that he had clearly a right to give advice to Geoffrey Fielding, who was still looking about—not too eagerly—for "an opening." His advice was, "Go back home." This he had repeated, with variations, ever since making Geoffrey's acquaintance, a week or two back. Naturally, the younger man resented it.

"It's all very well for you to talk like this now," he repeated; "you have sown your wild oats"—

"Ay, and reaped them!" interrupted the other.

"And it sounds all very fine and moral to preach to me about the confounded folly of doing the same. When I'm your age, I'll repeat your words to any youngster I get hold of, when he wants to taste and try for himself, and perhaps to make an ass of himself, in his own way. But he won't listen to me, you bet, any more than I am going to listen to you." Geoffrey laughed good-temperedly. Philip looked at him with a grim smile.

"No, I suppose not. When a fellow has not tried for himself, he is so deuced sure that he can't go wrong, whatever other fools may have done. could see a few years ahead— Well, one would chuck the whole thing up in terror, I guess. to God anyone had warned me where my cursed folly would land me! Perhaps — as you say — I should not have cared. But don't you see, Fielding, it isn't as though we each stood alone in the world; then we could go to the devil, if we chose, and do no harm to anyone else. It never is like that. am I, the best years of my life thrown away; and I've brought my wife through such rough places as no one but a woman like her would bear for any man's It has ruined her health, poor soul! now, if I should die, there's every penny I can leave for her and the little one, after all these years!" brought his hand down fiercely upon the pocket-book. "I should leave them with no position, no honour, no friends in the world; and with just two thousand pounds, scraped together after twenty years of what you call 'seeing the world.' . . . Hold on a bit, lad, and

listen to me. I don't often talk about myself, but I shall not see you again, perhaps, and I should like 'to point a moral and adorn a tale' for once. Fill your pipe. Well, when I left home my father was making fifteen thousand pounds a year, and his one wish was that I should stay with him, and help him to make it, and spend it. I was the eldest son, and the favourite. It is my own fault that a younger brother now has the business to himself; and I richly deserved that when the old man died, I should be left out in the cold. Though I give my brother credit for that arrangement—not the old man.

My wife is pining for home. "Look at me now! She is a Devonshire girl, and they get home-sickness badly, the Devonshire people. She thinks nothing else can save her life, and home I must take her. Sharp has bought this place from me; and I tell you I have two thousand pounds in this old pocket-book, and that is all, to begin the world with over again. I am going back to England an outcast from my family; there is not one who has not come to look upon me as a disgrace to the name. How am I to make a decent living for my wife and child, with no interest, no friends, no capital to speak of, and with the beastly habits I've picked up-which are second nature to me now? No! Reaping those wild oats you spoke of is a d-d bad piece of business, Fielding. Take warning, if you can. If you can't, well "-Philip

Dalton leaned back in his chair and puffed savagely at his pipe.

Geoffrey was more touched than he liked to show by the man's earnestness.

"I'm awfully sorry to hear you talk like this," he said. "I thought you were going home with a pot of money. But, don't be down-hearted! The voyage, and getting back to her native air, will be sure to set up Mrs. Dalton; and a man like you can get on anywhere. Two thousand pounds will give you a start."

He spoke reassuringly; he was almost inclined to despise the elder man's despondency. It seems a personal injury to the young, when the future, with all its beautiful possibilities, is darkened by forecasts of doubt and fear.

"It is late in the day for me to make a start," Dalton said. "I don't know what I shall do. I don't seem able to think of anything beyond the necessity of getting poor Bessie out of this place—and home. I'm not grumbling about my fate, Fielding. It's my own doing; but I would like to be the horrible example to warn you from following suit. Isn't it odd how plainly one sees all one's life spread out like a map, at times? This evening I have just such a vision. It is as if I stood on a height and looked back upon the road I've come by. All the past is painfully distinct—the future, a

blank." . . . He paused; looked absently into the flame of the lamp for a few minutes, and then went on. "What an utter fool I was to refuse to stay with my father! He offered me every inducement; and I knew he had set his heart upon it. hated trade—thought it beneath me. Good heavens! the things I have done since. Three years afterwards he was ill, and my mother wrote begging me to go home—and I refused her. Selfish beast I was. I had plenty of money when I first came out here, and all the scoundrels, and riff-raff in the place gathered about me-naturally. I soon picked up their ways of gambling and drinking, though I despised them-and myself too. And then, to mend matters, I married. Poor Bessie! it was a bad day for her, but I did it for the best. Her father—a shady lot he was !--was killed in a row in a gambling hell, in Denver. The poor girl was friendless, so I married her to protect her, and a pretty protection it has been!" He broke off with a half-laugh, halfsigh.

Geoffrey felt powerless to offer a word of acceptable sympathy. His companion's face was overcast with the gloom of despair. The retrospect he had indulged in seemed to have crushed him into silence. The younger man fidgeted, coughed, filled his pipe, and at last said—

"But, Dalton, to go back to the original question,

which was myself—if a fellow is not married, he does no harm to anyone by knocking about the world. I don't mean to marry. What harm can I do anyone by staying abroad a bit longer?"

"Of course you don't mean to marry. No man ever does in his senses. But as for not harming anyone—I'll be bound, if the truth were known, you have given pain to someone at home, by prancing off in what you think a fine high-spirited manner to see the world. You say it is nature prompting the young life to try its wings. Rot! it is nothing but impatience of restraint, in nine cases out of ten, and a resolve to get fun out of the universe for your worthy self, whoever suffers. You, for instance. Why did you come abroad? Why are you idling about here? You don't mean to buy a ranch; you are only playing at engineering; you are making no serious attempt to get settled work. Didn't you leave home simply to break from some rein that galled you?"

"Ye—es," said Geoffrey, with a flush on his face; "if you choose to put it that way, perhaps I did. It was an easy rein; but it bothered me. My father took it so much to heart when I chucked up the idea of taking Orders as he wished, that I came away, chiefly, I think, to get out of sight of his reproachful old face. Not that he ever said anything. And it was best for me to clear out. And as for harming the dear old boy!—it was the quickest way for him to

get over his disappointment. He consented quite willingly; and some day, before long, I'll show him that I've other stuff in me than parsons are made of, as a rule."

"I hope you will," Dalton said drily. "He has other sons and daughters at home, I suppose?"

"No. He is alone. But he writes theological books; and men don't want human society when they take to that entertainment. His books don't sell, and he is always up to the ears in debt; but grinds on at another immortal work, which is to be a success, and is hardly conscious of his surroundings;" and Geoffrey smiled at the remembrance his words called up.

"Humph!" Dalton ejaculated. "And you think it the part of a dutiful son to career all over the world for years, and leave him to his loneliness."

"What could I do for him? You don't seem to understand. I couldn't pretend to believe what I didn't believe, sign the Thirty-nine Articles, put on a surplice, and be an ordained fraud all my life, could I?" Geoffrey said, with warmth.

"I see. You had what are called 'conscientious scruples' against going into the Church."

"I had distinct scruples against telling lies. My father sometimes wanted to argue the points with me in which he thought I was mistaken. But my opinions went too deep for his arguments to reach. I had gone through Paley, and all that, and looked

ļ

and farther, and lose touch with home. . . . Come along to England with us? How do you know that you are not wanted there? No one wants you here."

Then Philip Dalton glanced at his watch, and got up, gathering together some of the things which strewed the table, and said in a half-hesitating way—

"You'll think I've been a thundering hypocrite, preaching to you like this. But I've not said a word I don't mean. Somehow, I want to do a good turn to someone, before I leave this place; and I'd like to get you away from this rabble, and not leave you to run your senseless young head into dangers, and end by being a wreck like me!"

"Oh, come, Dalton!" Geoffrey said, rising also, and laughing carelessly; "it's not so bad as that."

"Isn't it?" Philip said bitterly. "I seem to see myself in a true light to-night—I suppose because I am going to turn over a new leaf, and make a fresh start. And, I tell you, it's so bad as this—that I can't trust myself not to get mad drunk to-night and spend every penny of this money at euchre, and let my wife stay and die in this hole. Here, keep it for me! don't let me have it until I am safe in the cars." He thrust the pocket-book into Geoffrey's hand. "I'm giving the boys a farewell supper to-night. We are sure to make a big burst of it; but I've got a few dozen dollars in my pocket, and when I'm cleared out, I'll come away."

"All right," Geoffrey said. "Is it time to go? I am coming to see the fun too."

"No, you're not. I won't have you. They are a lot of bullying blackguards, for the most part, and you are best away."

"Nonsense! They won't hurt me. I'm not afraid of a bit of rough play now and then. Of course I am coming."

"Look here, Fielding," Dalton said, "I won't have you. I should be ashamed for you to be there. You would be a kind of check upon us all at first; and that would irritate us when we all get a bit 'on.' I won't have you. Besides, you promised Bessie that you would be here this evening to do something for her—nail down those cases or something. You'll stay, there's a good fellow." There was a touching gentleness in the gesture with which Philip laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

Geoffrey sat down. "I'll not come against your will; but do you think I'm not able to take care of myself?"

A strange look came into Dalton's eyes. "No, by God! I don't think the man is living who can take care of himself! Stay here, Geoffrey. The sight of your unspoiled life has made me bitterly conscious of what I've made of mine. It's too late for me to change, but I'd like to stop you from going the same way. And to-night"—

"Let me come, Dalton," Geoffrey said, with a quiver of feeling in his voice which he could not control. "Do let me come. Perhaps I—perhaps if I were there"—

Dalton interrupted him. "You think you might act my guardian angel, and bring me home sober and early? No, lad; it wouldn't come off. I know P. D. too well to encourage any such hopes—unhappily. But I'll do my best to keep cool, and it's the last time. Good-night, Bessie;" and he went towards the inner room.

A white-faced, fragile woman opened the door. "Are you going?"

"Yes. It's the farewell flare-up, and the boys will be getting impatient. Fielding is staying to help you. Little Bess asleep?"

He went into the bedroom and kissed his sleeping child; then, with a kiss to his wife and nod to Geoffrey, went out.

The "Saloon" where the supper was held was another wooden shanty a little way farther in the street than Dalton's store, and soon the voices of the revellers could be heard by Mrs. Dalton and Geoffrey. There was not much to be done to the boxes; and Mrs. Dalton in a few minutes went to her room, saying that she was tired; and Geoffrey was left to himself. His conversation with Philip Dalton had given him a good deal to think about, and he was not

altogether as well satisfied with himself as usual. The image of his father, bending over his dusty books, alone, uncared-for, as he had last seen him, was very vivid to him.

By and by, the noise of laughter, shouts, and rollicking songs grew louder, and he felt vexed that Dalton had been so persistent in refusing to let him join in the fun. Once or twice he went to the door and looked out. The air was frosty, and still as death. The large stars shone with marvellous lustre in the vast, blue-black sky. Most of the low buildings which composed the street of C——, were silent and dark; only from the "Saloon" lights streamed far into the darkness, and the sounds grew into roars of laughter, and shouts, and yells—more like the voices of beasts than of men.

Geoffrey was lodging in the hotel behind the Saloon. It was useless for him to think of going back, and to bed, until the party broke up. But as the sounds of merriment grew rougher and more boisterous, he wished that Dalton would come home, and regretted less his own absence from the entertainment.

Towards midnight he fell into a troubled sleep, from which he was wakened by the opening door, and a confused din of voices. He sprang up. A number of men were moving slowly into the room, carrying something—or someone. They moved slowly forward, nearer and nearer, and laid their burden—a man—

on the rug at Geoffrey's feet. Then someone straightened the big limbs and turned the head, and the light of the lamp fell upon the face of Philip Dalton.

"An ugly accident; but these things will happen," said the man who took the part of spokesman. "It was all done in fair play. There was a row. Dalton out with his revolver—the other man was quicker."

"Is he killed?" said Geoffrey, awestruck.

"No, not killed. We don't call this being killed. It's an accident. Shot through the heart—but all in the fair rules of the game. . . Oh yes, he is dead, poor chap—stone dead!"

Dead! This was the new leaf he had turned over; this was the fresh start he had made; this—the journey he had to take, and the end of all his journeyings.

## CHAPTER X

A FEW days later, Mrs. Dalton and her little girl, under the charge of Geoffrey Fielding, left for Quebec.

The shock of her husband's death almost stunned the woman. She had loved him devotedly, and submitted herself wholly to his will, with the unquestioning faith of weak-minded women. She had never attempted to win him from his bad habits. His faults were as much part of him as his virtues in her eyes. It was not possible for her to analyse the character nor condemn the conduct of the man who had taken her into his care when she was helpless, and who had shown kindness to her through everything.

Her husband had been her law, and now that he had gone, she seemed unable to form a wish or make a plan. She shrank in horror from the rough "cowboys," to whom she attributed her husband's death, and turned instinctively to Geoffrey for aid.

He did what he could for her; and as soon as possible got her away from C——, and determined that he would not leave her until he had seen her safe with her friends in England. That seemed the plain duty which had fallen to him, and he would not shirk it. He was tender-hearted, and the helpless condition of the widow and her child called forth his most chivalrous feelings.

It was a strange situation, and one of no little anxiety. Mrs. Dalton said that as her husband had trusted Geoffrey with his money, she could trust him. She left everything to him, and he found himself responsible for this woman, whose name he had never heard a month before.

The suddenness and horror of Philip Dalton's death had made a deep impression upon Geoffrey, and, for the time at least, had shaken him out of his light-hearted self-confidence. Perhaps he would never again step onwards with that happy indifference to what lies ahead—with that perfect sense of security which is only ours before the shadow of death has fallen across our path. Geoffrey had been as ready as anyone to talk glibly of "the uncertainty of life." But death had been to him as to many a mere truism—a truism which it is easy to treat with the contempt of familiarity until it knocks at our own door and cries, "Here I am, good sir! You have talked about me often. Now look close at me.

What do you think of me now? I am Death!" After that we know the truism to be an awful truth; and we do not talk about it.

Thus roughly startled out of his self-complacency, Philip Dalton's words on the night of his death came to Geoffrey's mind with solemn meaning. was ashamed when he recalled the heartless way in which he had spoken of his father, and was filled with a sudden longing to be in England, that he might hasten home, and assure himself that all was well with the old man. Remorse—a new and very unpleasant feeling-began to sting. He knew that he had not acted kindly. He had neglected to write He had been selfish and indifferent. to his father. This was the truth, and it made him uncomfortable. But, after all, it was only three years that he had "wasted"—if "waste" it was. There was plenty of time ahead in which he could make up for it. would go home with poor Dalton's widow and child, and, when they were in safety, would settle down to steady work, and take up engineering in earnest.  $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{s}$ for really "neglecting" his father, it was absurd.  $\mathbf{He}$ had never meant to do anything of the kind.

It was no use to write now. He expected to be in England almost as soon as a letter would be, and writing was irksome when there was so much explanation to be done.

When he arrived at Quebec with the invalid and

her child, he hastened to secure passages for himself and his charges on board the *Sarmatian*. He was miserably anxious about Mrs. Dalton, and dreaded the voyage. Yet the one wish she expressed was to get to England. At his entreaty, she consented to see a doctor. Geoffrey was not surprised to be told that Mrs. Dalton was dying. Her heart was literally broken by the shock of her husband's death, and her small stock of vitality was rapidly passing away.

In the evening after the doctor's visit, Mrs. Dalton sent for Geoffrey. She was lying on a couch, prostrate, but with an expression of greater contentment than her face had worn since the dreadful moment when she saw her husband's dead body lying in the lamplight.

"I want to say something to you, Mr. Fielding, while I can," she said. "The doctor thinks very badly of me?"

"Won't it tire you to talk now? Won't you wait till to-morrow?" Geoffrey said, evading the question.

"No. There are some things on my mind, and I shall sleep better if I have told you all I want to say. I want to give you one or two addresses, in case I should not live to find my friends and leave Bessie in their care."

"But there is plenty of time," the young man said, with something like a shudder. It was terrible to him to come face to face with death once more. He

wanted to blink it; to the dying woman it seemed to be a matter of indifference.

"Perhaps not much time," she said, smiling faintly. "It seems to me as if I have been more than half dead ever since Philip left me. And it will be much easier for you, afterwards, if I tell you clearly what to do with the poor child. I am ashamed to burden you with all this, but there is no one else. And—I have never thanked you, Mr. Fielding, for your great kindness to me. It has been wonderful! You were almost a stranger; I had no claim upon you"—

"Every woman, when she is in trouble, has a claim upon a man," he interrupted.

"That is what my husband used to say. Still, I like to tell you how grateful I am. People have been very kind to me all my life. I only trust my poor little Bessie will be as fortunate."

Geoffrey, remembering what he had heard of her life, marvelled how it had been "fortunate." Mrs. Dalton went on—

"It seems more likely than not that Bessie will be left in your sole care; and in that case, I should like you to communicate with her father's brother, Mr. Richard Dalton, and with my sister. Mr. Dalton is a wealthy man, and if he does not wish to undertake the personal guardianship of Bessie, perhaps he will invest her little fortune, or do something for her. This is his address—I found it among my husband's papers.

They were not friendly of late; but I should like him to know about the child, and that her father has not left her quite penniless. You have the money?"

"Yes," Geoffrey said; "two thousand pounds it amounts to. Well-invested, it will be a small independence for her."

"If Mr. Dalton declines to have anything to do with her, I should like my sister to take charge of her—that is, if she can be found. She married a Mr. George Robinson, and was living in Torquay ten years ago. This is her address. She may be dead, for I have not heard from her for years."

"And if so"—Geoffrey began.

"If so—oh, Mr. Fielding, I implore you not to throw Bessie over to the charge of strangers! Promise me, that if neither her uncle nor aunt will undertake the charge of her, you will. I should be perfectly happy to leave you her guardian without any reference to them. My husband trusted you, and I can trust you. But it seems right and natural to appeal first to her own relations. If they fail, will you promise me that you will keep guard over my child, and be as good to her as you have been to her mother?"

"I will do my best for her," he said. "If it makes you happier to have my promise, I promise faithfully to take all the care I can of her, and her money, in case her relations will not—or cannot. But is there

no one else you could name as joint guardian? It is a serious trust; and I am almost a stranger to you."

She put her hand upon his and looked at him wistfully. "Yes, almost a stranger! But you could not betray such a charge. My husband liked you, and showed that he trusted you; and I think he would say that I am doing right. God bless you for all you have done for me in my great need! And God do so to you as you do to my child!"

Geoffrey saw that her lips were white, and that she was exhausted. He put the papers she had given him into Philip Dalton's pocket-book, pressed her hand, bade her a gentle "good-night," and left her.

Before morning she became worse, sank into unconsciousness, and in the course of the next day quietly died.

Geoffrey had, once again, to make funeral arrangements, and act as chief mourner, for a stranger; and realised, with a mixed sense of gratified importance and heavy responsibility, that he was in a strange and difficult position. The consciousness that it was an unusual and to some extent a romantic position to be placed in, undoubtedly lessened the burden. Adventures he had wished for. Here was an adventure, not of his seeking, but due to a certain merit in himself. It would be a creditable story to relate how this desolate widow had confided her

child, and her child's little fortune, to him, a stranger. It spoke volumes that he should be so trusted. course there was the possibility that his charge would come to an end on his arrival in England; but it was quite as possible that Bessie would be left in his care. If so, he would do his utmost for her happiness. He decided, thinking out the future on that side, that he would take her to Ernthwaite, and consult Mrs. Sylvestre. Geoffrey felt, with keen satisfaction, that it would be very pleasant to tell this interesting story to Judith; and he fancied he could see her eyes shine approval, and hear her say, " Of course the poor woman could trust you, Geoffrey! Anyone could see that you were to be trusted." He began to wonder how he should find all his friends in the dear old place, and to hope that there were What an exciting episode it not many changes. would be in the somnolent life of Ernthwaite—his return, with the stranger's little orphan in his charge! How the good folk would stare and talk!

Still, there was a serious side to the affair. It seemed to Geoffrey a great blessing, from poor Mrs. Dalton's point of view, that it was he who had happened to be able to befriend her on her husband's death. The poor woman might easily have fallen into the power of an unscrupulous adventurer. Nothing would be simpler than to appropriate Dalton's cash, and get rid of the child. Such villainy would

only be what one might expect from some of the loose characters knocking about the world, as he himself had been doing when he came across Philip Dalton. But certainly it was lucky that he, Geoffrey Fielding, who knew himself to be above suspicion, had chanced to be the recipient of this grave trust. "I will do right by the little thing, to the utmost of my power," he said. And he meant it.

Geoffrey quickly won the affections of the delicate-looking little child thus thrown upon his hands. He was good-natured, and had winning manners; and when he set himself to comfort and amuse the four-years old maiden, he soon succeeded. She was a docile, old-fashioned child; her prattle was a mixture of sense and babyishness, for she had been brought up entirely with her mother, and apart from other children, and had odd, womanly ways which were pathetic in the forlorn creature. Her little white face and big blue eyes, added to her sad story, touched the hearts of all the womenkind in the hotel; and everyone wanted to help Geoffrey with the care of the child.

He found himself already posing as a hero; and was pleasantly conscious that he was the object of considerable interest among some of his fellow-passengers, when, with the mite of a girl, in her black frock, clinging to his hand, he went on board the Sarmatian.

"Stand here for a moment, Bessie," he said, "while I look after the luggage." But when he came back to the place where he had left her, the child was not to be seen. The passengers were moving about in the confusion which attends the beginning and end of a voyage; and Geoffrey could not find his little charge. Suddenly he felt a light touch on his arm, and heard a voice. He said afterwards that the touch and the sound thrilled him to the heart. Probably he was mistaken; and it was not until he turned and saw the speaker that his heart was in any wise affected.

"Your little girl was alone, and so was I. We made friends, and are taking care of one another," said a young widow, whose hand clasped the tiny hand of Bessie Dalton. From beneath the pathetic and becoming veil, carelessly thrown aside, gleamed waves of golden hair; and a pair of innocent hazel eyes were raised timidly to his.

## CHAPTER XI

A CLEAN, cheerful kitchen; a bright fire with the kettle just "on the boil"; the table laid for tea—can any picture of an interior be pleasanter to the eyes of a quiet old maid? Miss Jane Owthwaite thought not. Every evening, when work was over and she sat down to her refreshing cup of tea, she thanked the Lord that she had so many more comforts than she deserved. However much she might have had to pinch at times, when work was scarce, or when her health had been bad, she had always been able to have "a good cup of tea for herself and her friends," and she never began the meal without fervently reminding herself of her innumerable blessings.

It was a cold, damp autumn evening; and the little dressmaker, when she had poured the water on the tea, stirred the fire into a blaze. The flames shot up, and the light danced merrily on the brass candlesticks, and fender; on the white tablecloth

and shining tray; on the plate-rack over the dresser, with its pretty blue and white crockery, and on the tired, sallow face of the cripple. She had poured out a cup of the fragrant tea, and sipped it, when there was a knock at her front door. A smile brightened her eyes. "The young ladies, I suppose!" and she limped to welcome them, as fast as she could.

It was a stranger who had knocked, and his appearance was not prepossessing, in Miss Owthwaite's opinion. Strangers were never thought much of in Ernthwaite; and this man looked rough and burly. He appeared to be of middle age, and was in seafaring clothes. He had a small box and a carpet-bag roped together in one hand; by the other he held a little girl, in black. "And the moment I saw her," said Miss Owthwaite, when she told the story,—"the very moment I saw the wee bairn, I knew she was motherless, and my heart went out to her!"

People who knew Miss Owthwaite, however, knew that her heart had a way of "going out" to bairns, or to all who wanted help and comfort, and saw nothing strange in the fact.

"Good-evening, ma'am," said the man. "I'm looking for lodgings, and the young chap at the station told me your rooms were empty just now. Could you find a berth for me and this little lass?"

Miss Owthwaite hesitated. She was very par-

ticular about her lodgers, as was natural to a timid, unprotected woman. The man was not the kind of lodger she would have chosen. But then—the child.

"Do you want the rooms for some time, or only for a few days?" she said, temporising.

"I can't say. It might be for nought but a night or two—it might be for good and all."

There was certainly something suspicious in his manner; and—surely it was not to be doubted that his countenance betrayed a fondness for a stronger beverage than tea. But—the little white-faced child!

"What terms do you want to pay?" she said, vainly trying to harden her heart. "My rooms are not cheap."

"Just what you like to ask, ma'am. Th' little lass is cold and tired,—ain't you, Bessie?—and I don't mean to go any farther, if you'll let us cast anchor here. Besides—begging your pardon!—the name took my fancy. I'm a north country man myself; and Owthwaite smacks of the North. My name is Martin Crouch."

The man had a pleasant smile, and the deferential tone in speaking to a woman which is characteristic of seamen, and makes them generally irresistible, in spite of sundry failings equally characteristic of the class.

"Yes, she does look tired, bless her! You had

better step in, and see if the rooms will suit you," said Miss Owthwaite, yielding at discretion.

Martin and Bessie stepped in. Martin shut the door to keep out the damp, cold air, and then put down his luggage, and laid his hat on the top of it.

"The rooms 'll suit us, right enough. But"-

Bessie caught sight of the kitchen through the open door. The dancing firelight, gleaming on the white tablecloth and blue china, was fascinating.

"Oh, look how nice! Do let me go in there!" she cried, and, twisting her hand from Martin's, flew past him into the kitchen, and sat down on the rug in front of the fire.

Miss Owthwaite and Martin followed. "Bless her little heart!" the dressmaker said, with tears in her eyes. "Has she lost her mother?"

"Ay, and her father too, both out in America; and she's been cruelly wronged into the bargain." Martin's face darkened for a moment, then he went on. "She is only in my charge till her own folk come to claim her—if they ever do. But you won't want the little lass in here, Miss Owthwaite; and we've broke in upon your tea, I'm thinking;" and Martin made as though he would take Bessie away.

"Yes, I was just sitting down to it," Miss Owthwaite said; "and I'm sure the little one will be ready for something to eat and drink—won't you, my dearie?"

"Yes, please," the child said. "If you'll take my things off, I'll stop here. May I, kind Martin? and you too?"

Miss Owthwaite kissed her, and quickly took off her wraps. Martin was invited to bring another chair to the table; another spoonful of tea was added to the pot; and in a few moments, the dressmaker, a flush of excitement on her face, was entertaining the suspicious-looking stranger with all her usual cordiality, and bringing out jam and cake for the child.

A few words which Martin let fall soon after the meal began, made her mind easy, and banished all lingering scruples.

"I'd like to tell you the business I'm come here about, Miss Owthwaite, if I could, just to let all be aboveboard and clear sailing between us. But I want to see the parson first. I'd like to tell him the case, and get to know a bit more of the right bearings, before I say ought to other folk. D'ye see, ma'am?"

"Oh, if you have business with the vicar, I'm sure you're welcome in Ernthwaite; and I don't want any other reference. The vicar's my best friend—and everyone's friend!" said Miss Owthwaite.

"I'm glad to hear it," Martin said. "He knows nothing of me, but I've come from Liverpool on purpose to see him, and to get his help."

"You couldn't have done better. If anyone can help you, he can," she said.

"Don't let us go back to Liverpool, kind Martin!" Bessie said, hearing the word. "I want to stay here. I've always been going away, and going away, and I don't want to go away any more. I like this place the best in England. May I stay with you? and kind Martin too?" and she put her tiny hand towards Miss Owthwaite.

Miss Owthwaite took it, sticky as it was with jam, and held it tenderly. "Yes, my dear, you shall, if the Lord wills!"

After tea Martin was taken to see if the rooms would suit. Compared with the musty, grimy, tobacconist's shop apartments which had been his home for some time, the trim little front parlour and the wholesome, white-draperied bedroom were like Paradise.

"I've a small bedstead which will do nicely for little Bessie," said Miss Owthwaite. "Perhaps it would be best to put it in my room. I love children, and maybe I understand them better than you."

"That's true enough," said Martin, but he hesitated.

"Still, at nights I feel as if—she's only been with me a short time, ma'am—but I feel as if I had an angel in the room, and I'd like best to have her with me. I found myself a bit clumsy in dressing her this

morning, and if you didn't mind the trouble, and would make an extra charge, and let her come to you"—

"Yes, yes, of course," Miss Owthwaite interrupted.

"It'll be a real pleasure. And, please, don't talk as if I could charge anything for such a small service! Isn't it an honour to be allowed to do anything for one of the Lord's little ones?"

Martin put the candle which he was carrying on the chest of drawers, and took Miss Owthwaite's hand.

"Thank you, ma'am!" he said solemnly. "It's the name as does it, Miss Owthwaite! I knew I couldn't be mistaken; I knew that folk of your name would have the heart in the right place."

They went downstairs, and Martin followed Miss Owthwaite into the kitchen.

"There's another thing I feel bound to speak about, Miss Owthwaite," he said. He hesitated, rubbed his chin slowly, and looked sheepish. "Folk might say I wasn't the kind of chap to come and settle into a respectable woman's house. It's true I've been too fond of drink, and it's got the better of me too often. But since that little lass, bless her! was put in my care, I've not touched a drop, and I don't mean to while she is with me. I've taken my oath on it, and you may trust me, ma'am."

"Say 'with God's help,' Mr. Crouch. It is an awful temptation, and our hearts are weak," began

Miss Owthwaite, wondering at her own weakness in admitting this questionable man to her house.

"I'll say with God's help to please you," he said, with a short laugh. "But, help or no help, I can keep an oath. And the little lass has made a new man of me, somehow. She's a rare loving little soul; I couldn't make a drunken beast of myself before her, bless her!"

Martin wanted to go to the Vicarage that evening; but Miss Owthwaite assured him that the vicar would be at the schools; so he waited till morning; then, leaving Bessie perfectly happy with a needle and thread and rag of bright stuff, he went to the Vicarage and asked for "Mr. Fielding."

The maid jerked her thumb over her shoulder. "You must go to th' churchyard then. You'll find him yon'."

"Thank you."

Martin turned away, but she called him back.

"Why! don't ye know that t'ould parson has been dead and buried nigh twelve months?"

"Of course I didn't know," Martin said. "Dash it!" He stood muttering to himself, scratching his head in perplexity and vexation, and gazing into the sturdy damsel's unsympathetic countenance.

"I don't think t'ould parson would ha' done much for you," she said, enjoying the episode, and not wishing to dismiss the inquirer too promptly. "He was fair moidered with too much book-learning long afore he was buried. But the new vicar's got his wits about him, and if he'll do for you, he's inside now, and ye can see him."

"I don't know that it would be any use. I'm a stranger"—

"No need o' telling me that. D'ye think we don't know a stranger? Now ye've only come t' Ernthut last night, maybe?"

"Yes; and it's not much good to trouble your master, perhaps"—

"Oh, he thinks nothing o' trouble, bless you! If anyone wants to see him, they can see him, day or night—them's his orders. You'd best come in."

Accordingly Martin was shown into the study, where Jonathan Dale sat writing, near the window. The winter sunshine fell on his face as he looked up—a face so earnest and eloquent of sympathy, that no man or woman seeing it could be unconscious of an instinctive assurance that here was a friend, if a friend was wanted.

Mr. Dale looked much stronger than when he came to Ernthwaite. The bracing air and healthy country life had done much to restore him; and now energy and activity, if no exuberant vitality, were in every tone of his voice and expression of his features. He got up when Martin entered, and came forward with the courtesy he showed to all visitors, gentle and simple.

- "I was hoping to find Mr. Fielding here, sir," Martin began, with a sort of apology.
- "He died last March. I have been vicar for some months. Won't you sit down? Perhaps I can be of service to you," said Mr. Dale.
- "I'm sorry he is dead," Martin went on. "Not that I knew the old gentleman; but I've come here on purpose to tell him something about his son, Mr. Geoffrey Fielding."

"Something good, I hope?" the vicar said, with eagerness. "Mr. Geoffrey Fielding's friends here have heard nothing of him for long, and have been very anxious. I hope your news is good?"

Martin twisted his hat in his hands, and made a sound like a grunt, before he said, "He's alive and well; but he's been after doing something that I call blackguard, and I came here to get his father to stop it. I'm a rough sort of chap, sir, and I call a spade a spade. And what he's doing is a dirty, blackguardly trick—bad as I am, I couldn't have done it, d— it!—begging your pardon, sir. But I hoped to put a stop to it, and now I don't see how I can!"

"Perhaps there's some mistake. I don't know young Mr. Fielding, but I feel sure there must be a mistake. Don't do anything unless you are quite sure of your facts; and don't bring an accusation against an absent man, unless you feel obliged. It would grieve Mr. Fielding's friends here to have such things

spread about." Mr. Dale's thoughts had flown instantly to one staunch friend of Geoffrey's, who, he well knew, would uphold his integrity as her own.

"There's no mistake about the wrong he's done already. It's to prevent worse I came here to see his father. Perhaps you'll hear the whole story, sir, and tell me what you think of it," Martin said.

"If you are obliged to make it known at all, tell me," the vicar said, reluctant to hear anything against Geoffrey, but hoping that he would be able to disprove the charges which this stranger was about to make.

"In my opinion I am obliged, sir, and I must begin with a word or two about myself, tho' I've nought to tell that's very creditable. I'm a seaman, as anyone may see. My name's Crouch-Martin Crouch. Three years back, I gave up the sea. I'd saved a bit of money, and invested it in Dock Bonds, and thought I'd settle down, and make a home for my daughter." Martin paused, coughed, gulped, and looked into his "My daughter's my only child, and it's hard to hat. speak against her, sir. But I believe the devil's in She's as beautiful a bit of womankind as ever her. I clapt eyes on, and she gets round the men like witchcraft. Perhaps I was too rough on her, but I only tried to keep her in hand a little—and all at once I found that she'd got a swell chap sweethearting her -and-well, she ran away from home with him. I heard nothing for some time. Then she wrote from

America, and said she had been married, but that he had deserted her. It was a fine letter, all repentance, and 'dear father,' and so on. She said she was dying of hunger, and implored me to send her money, and to let her come home. There was a lot more humbug, and of course I sent her money. She wrote again that she was coming over by a Cunard liner, and I went to But the girl never came, and I began to think it had been one of her tricks to get money out of me. Well, a few weeks ago she turned up at my lodging in Liverpool,—did I tell you I lived there? I'd given up my house when my girl left me,-and she had a wee lassie with her. 'Father,' says Sarah as pert as ever, 'I changed my mind, and came by the Sar-And I've had quite an adventure—in fact, I met a gentleman on board who fell in love with me, and we were married at the Registrar's office yesterday.'

"'Sarah,' says I, 'where's husband No. 1?' 'Oh,' says she, 'didn't I tell you he was dead? I was wearing widow's weeds when Geoffrey fell in love with me. You can't think how becoming they were!' Well, sir, upon my soul! I don't know if she was lying to me or not. To look at her, you'd say she was as innocent as a babe. She has eyes as sweet and clear as a bit of the blessed sky; I don't wonder at any man losing his head about her. But the worst part's to come. 'My husband and I are going to London for our honeymoon,' says she, 'and I want you

to keep this little girl until we send for her, in a week or so.' 'Who is she?' says I. 'A child he was bringing home; her parents had died, and left her in his care. We can't have her when we go for our honeymoon it would be too ridiculous, wouldn't it?' says she, laughing in her saucy way. 'There was no one I could trust her with but you, dear old daddy,' says she coaxing like, and she put her arms round my neck, 'and I know you'll do this little kindness for me. be more than a week or two.'... Perhaps you know their ways and their wiles, sir. She kissed and coaxed, but I didn't like the look of it. I wasn't a fit man to have charge of a delicate little lassie, and I told her 'Oh, but you must reform and be good,' she says, 80. laughing, 'and give up your drinking ways.' then she says to the child, 'You'll stay with kind Martin Crouch, and be a good little thing till we come back, Bessie!' and she kissed her and kissed me, and before I knew what she was up to, she had whisked herself out of the room, and out of the house. there I was with the little lass on my hands, and her box of clothes standing in the passage.

"It's a long story, sir—and I've not got to the worst yet. I had to make the best of it, and keep the child,—and a sweet little bairn she is, too,—and I swore I'd keep off the drink while she was with me, and do right by her till they sent for her. But Sarah and her husband have took no notice of me since that

hour, sir, and I don't believe they ever will. And in the child's box among her clothes, I found this "—He took a bit of paper out of his pocket-book and handed it to Mr. Dale. It was a statement written by Mrs. Dalton the evening before her death, to say that she left Bessie and her two thousand pounds in the sole guardianship of Geoffrey Fielding. "Now you begin to understand what the blackguard business is, don't you, sir?" Martin said, when Mr. Dale gave him back the paper.

"I suppose you mean that Mr. Fielding has appropriated the child's money, and does not intend to send for her again? I cannot believe it."

"What else can he have done?" Martin said. "The child's shuffled off upon me, and not a word said about any money. I suppose Sarah had forgotten this paper, or didn't know it was among the little un's And I shouldn't have known how to get at him but that there was a few photographs put together by the poor mother—her own, and the child's father. She had written the name on each, poor soul! and there was one in an envelope addressed to the Rev. J. Fielding, Ernthwaite Vicarage—and under it was written in the same hand, 'Mr. Geoffrey Fielding.' I suppose he had given it to Mrs. Dalton, and his home address—some time. So when I found that, I determined to come away here at once, and see if the father of this rascal was an honest man. I thought maybe he would make his son restore the child's money. It maddens me to think that a man could rob a little lass who was left in his charge. But I have no doubt my girl has been at the bottom of it. He don't look a bad sort in his pictur', and the poor dead woman out there trusted him. My girl could make a man do any devilry to please her—and he may think the child's in good keeping. But to suppose that I'm a fit person to have the care of her—a drunken brute like me!"—He stopped and swore under his breath.

"It is a terrible story. It is a damnable thing to rob the dead woman and the helpless child, if it comes to that," Mr. Dale said. "But we must wait. He may mean to put it right—I feel sure he will. Meanwhile I only see one thing clearly. You must not be a drunken brute, while you have charge of the little-lass, at least. Where are you staying?"

"I've got rooms with a woman who has the body of a cripple and the face of an angel."

"Miss Owthwaite! That's capital. You couldn't be better off."

"I knew that, sir, the moment I saw her. I've not been much with good women—more's the pity; but I know one when I see her." Then Martin stood up. "I've no right to keep you longer. But I don't like to do nothing, and feel that the child's being robbed of her bit of money. Couldn't I set the lawyers on to find Mr. Fielding?"

The vicar shook his head. "Not yet. Wait a few weeks, and give him time to come to his senses. Besides, it would involve all sorts of difficulties to find him. You don't know where they are; and he has legal control over the child and her money, evidently. If you are put to great expense—if it is the cost of her keep"—

"Hold hard, sir!" Martin broke in. "You don't know me, or you wouldn't think I'd grudge the blessed little lass anything. It would hurt me to part with her; but right is right, and I don't see that it's fair play to let her be robbed. You seem to want to screen the man; and the woman—and she's the worst of the two, I dare swear, is my daughter—yet"—

"But there is no harm in waiting for a few weeks. Stay where you are. Send your present address to your lodgings in Liverpool, so that they will know where to find you when they wish to do so. I feel sure Geoffrey Fielding cannot mean to desert and rob this little one. At anyrate, she couldn't be better off than where she is. . . . Perhaps, even if her money is lost, the Father of the fatherless has something better in store for her. May I come and see you and your little lass?"

"I'll take it very kindly of you, sir," Martin said, clasping the hand the vicar offered. "I'll not forget your straight tip about me not being a drunken beast, either. I've made up my mind to keep sober while the little lass is with me. It's

not as easy as you may think—but I'll keep my word."

"I am sure you will. And you won't speak of Mr. Fielding's part in this matter, I hope. It could do no good, and would distress his friends here."

"No, I'll say nought about him, if you think it's best."

As time went on, however, and nothing was heard of Geoffrey, the vicar felt that in justice to the wronged child, steps ought to be taken to procure the restitution of her money. Martin soon settled down contentedly at Miss Owthwaite's, and little Bessie seemed perfectly happy.

Still, something ought to be done, the vicar felt; and he began cautiously to make inquiries which might at least lead to the discovery of Geoffrey's whereabouts.

## CHAPTER XII

MARTIN kept his promise; but though Geoffrey's name was not spoken in connection with Bessie, before long everyone in Ernthwaite knew the outline of her story: that her mother, dying suddenly, had left her, and her little store of money, in charge of a stranger who was on his way to England; that the stranger had handed over the child to Martin Crouch, and made off with the money. Everyone was filled with indignation against the unknown villain, about whose history and character numerous remarkable details speedily grew up in the rank soil of gossip. Everyone felt convinced that Martin had been the victim of a shameful plot, and little Bessie of deliberate fraud. And, at the same time, everyone praised Martin for coming to Ernthwaite, and for bestowing upon that sleepy spot so exciting a subject for a nine days' wonder.

By and by the excitement subsided. Martin conducted himself prudently and soberly. He became

a favourite referee among the boatmen, station men, and labourers, and was never at a loss for something to occupy all the time which he could spare from He was devoted to the child; and the figures of the burly seaman and the tiny maiden holding his hand, became familiar to Ernthwaite. As long as the weather was fine enough, he took her often on the lake steamer, hoping to coax some colour into her wan little face. But the winter came on apace; Bessie had a cough; and by degrees Martin had to leave her more and more indoors, and take her out only when the sun was shining. In the evening, after Miss Owthwaite had put Bessie to bed, Martin sometimes went into the kitchen, and read the news Miss Owthwaite had never to her while she sewed. cared about newspaper literature, nor did she now. But she said to herself that since he had offered to read, it would be ungracious to refuse; and it was a relief to her still rather suspicious and anxious mind, to know that he was safely occupied, and out of all temptation. To Martin it was a safeguard. dreaded the evening hours, when the old craving for drink would be strongest upon him. No one knew (the dressmaker least of all) the fierce struggles which went on within him, day by day. Still, in such a fight, every victory makes the next easier. times Martin would go to his bedroom, and force himself to sit and look at the sweet face of his

little lass, until the overpowering desire for stimulant had left him. He could not go deliberately and make a beast of himself, knowing that the innocent sleeping child was there—in his bedroom.

Bessie was as great a success in Ernthwaite as Martin. Miss Owthwaite's "young ladies"—her two special patrons and favourites, Gladys Tyson and Judith Mordaunt—soon heard all that she knew of the child's sad story, and were deeply interested in her. Gladys and Judith were Miss Owthwaite's favourite customers, because—paradoxical as it sounds—the one gave her so much trouble, and the other so little.

١

Gladys had her dresses made by Miss Owthwaite from economical motives, and drove the poor dress-maker to the verge of distraction by her fancies and whimsies, and insistance upon this fashion or the other. Gladys would trip in and out of Miss Owthwaite's cottage and be "tried on" two or three times a day, when a new gown was in progress; altering this frill and that flounce, studying *Le Follet*, chattering, smiling, flitting hither and thither "like a sunbeam," said the patient little dressmaker, who would have been heart-broken had Miss Gladys gone to anyone else.

Judith came to Miss Owthwaite because she was sure country-made things were best, and because Miss Owthwaite knew exactly what she wanted, and never bothered her. Her plain woollen winter dress, and her white summer dresses, scarcely ever varied. She liked them best as simple as possible.

"It is a matter of instinct," said Gladys one day, when the two girls were comparing notes on the subject of dress. "Plain things suit you. I should look insignificant in a straight-down serge gown like that—and I don't like to look insignificant!"

"I suppose it is instinct," Judith answered. "I should feel like a doll in a shop window in all your fal-lals; but you always look quite right."

But if the girls differed in their theories of dress, they agreed in loving the Methodist dressmaker. had known them both from childhood; and though she sometimes ventured "a word in season about their immortal souls" in the midst of discussions anent such earthly vanities as ruches and ribbons, and would implore them to be convinced of sin while there was yet time, she would have been deeply hurt if anyone had suggested that either of her young ladies had a single sin to be convinced of, except that of original naughtiness. Now that Bessie was with Miss Owthwaite, they came more than ever to see her. Judith especially was delighted with the child, and made a great pet of her. Her old-fashioned ways and quaint prattle were amusing after the stolid shyness of the country children. Bessie accepted Judith's advances with the calm condescension which

children often show to elders who seek to win their affection. She loved Martin best; Miss Owthwaite next; Judith and Gladys and the rest came a long way behind these two. Judith took the little girl two or three times to Ernthwaite Hall, where the dogs and horses, flowers and pictures and pretty things pleased her, and she seemed very happy. One evening, when Bessie had been spending the day there, Mrs. Sylvestre said to Judith, "That child is very much changed; what is the matter with her? Has she been ill?"

"No. She has only had a cold, and not been out much. And she is a delicate-looking mite. Poor wee thing! Fancy any man having the heart to rob and desert that child! I suppose it was the Mr. Jeffrey she talks about sometimes who has robbed her."

"I daresay a good deal of that story is untrue," said Mrs. Sylvestre. "But instead of wasting wrath upon the unknown villain who did, or didn't do all he is credited with, I think some of you ought to look after the child's health. She seems to me to be fading away."

"Oh, Cousin Mary, don't say that! She was tired to-day, when you saw her," Judith remonstrated.

"She is very often tired," said Mrs. Sylvestre.
"She is soon tired of play, soon tired of food.

She will tire of life before long—unless she alters greatly."

The next day Judith begged Miss Owthwaite to send for Dr. Tyson to see Bessie.

"I've been thinking of it these last few days," Miss Owthwaite said, with a look of distress on her face. "The child has changed sadly since the cold weather set in, and she was delicate when she came. But I don't like to speak a word of it to Mr. Crouch; and she's not to say really ill. She never frets; she's as contented as a bird, and has been from the moment she sat down there on the hearthrug and said, 'Let me stay here.' Little lamb! Eh, Miss Judith, I daren't tell Mr. Crouch what we fear. He's that wrapped up in her! He says she has saved him. He's a strange man, and has strange ways; and I'm afraid, if it's the Lord's will to take the child"—

"Oh, but we needn't decide that," Judith interrupted. "Let Dr. Tyson see her, before you tell Mr. Crouch anything."

When Dr. Tyson had examined her, he said-

"The little thing has no constitution, no vitality. Her heart is weak—every function is weak. I expect that if I knew the history of her parents, that would explain it. With extreme care from the beginning, she might have been coddled up to fifteen or sixteen years of age. She would never have lived to be a healthy woman. And I should think she has had

some knocking about before she came here, and her small share of vital force is pretty nearly exhausted, poor lassie! You won't keep her long, do what you will."

Then Martin had to be told. At first he entirely refused to believe it, and put it down to women's fads; but as the winter went on, the child's fast-increasing weakness, in spite of all that could be done for her, forced the truth upon him. Everyone could see now that, as Mr. Dale had said to Martin, God meant something far better than the recovery of her little fortune for the orphan, and was taking her into His own closer keeping.

But Martin could not be comforted. "It's no good telling me she'll be better off," he said to the vicar. "I want her to stay with me. . . . Is it any fault of mine? Is it anything I've done, or not done for her? I'd give my worthless life a dozen times if that could help her. Of course I wasn't a fit person to have the charge of her—I said so from the first. But, before God! I swear I've done the best I knew. She was making a new man of me, and I love her like my own child, and she is happy with me. Why can't another child die, and my little lass be left?"

The vicar shook his head. "Nay, Martin! if I could tell you that, I could answer once for all the riddle of the painful earth! Be sure it is not your fault. Try to be thankful for her sake that life here

is ending so peacefully. Dr. Tyson says that if she had grown up, it would have been only to suffer."

After that, Martin hardly ever left his little lass. He nursed her with the tenderness of a woman; sat up with her at night if she was restless, and took her on his knee, and told stories to her, and sang old sea ballads to her; there was no limit to his care and patience. "Ah, sir!" Miss Owthwaite said more than once to the vicar, with tears in her eyes, "he's not a believing man; he's not turned to the Lord; but he has a tender heart. Please God he will find grace some day!"

"Miss Owthwaite, what can it be but God's grace that makes him tender-hearted now?" said Mr. Dale; but the dressmaker shook her head.

If Bessie had been a princess she could not have been tended with greater love and care. Dainties and luxuries of all sorts were brought by Judith and Gladys; and Dr. Tyson tried all the resources of his skill to avert the end. But neither love nor care can baffle the Angel of Death. Gently he descended, and the little one passed from earth without a pang.

She lay dying all through one March day. In the evening she asked Martin to nurse her, and he wrapped her in a blanket, and sat near the fire with the child on his knee. Her eyes were wide open, fixed on his face questioningly; and presently a smile parted her parched lips. He tried to smile back, murmuring,

"What is it, my pretty? Do you want something?"

Bessie put up her tiny hand and stroked his rough cheek. "Kind Martin!" she said; "kind Martin, kiss me! I'm so tired, I want to go to sleep!"

He kissed her; she rested her head against his breast and closed her eyes; as the twilight faded, her breath grew feebler, and when it was dark the little lass was dead.

All Ernthwaite mourned for the stranger's child. She was buried under the yew-tree in a corner of the churchyard close to old Mr. Fielding's grave. Judith laid flowers about the sweet little body and round the grave, and Martin would let no one but himself carry her to her resting-place.

When all was over, Mr. Dale anxiously begged Martin to go home with him.

"No," the man said, with sullen, half-repressed anger. "I can't stand any preaching at to-day, and I might say something I'd better not say to a parson. You can talk to them blubbering women about resignation and suchlike rot—not to me. That child was like an angel from heaven to me, and could ha' saved me from hell. He's taken her from me, and that means—if it means anything—that hell is the place for me, and heaven for her. It's been a cursedly cruel piece of business all along, and I don't care who hears me say so. Miss Owthwaite, poor

soul! says 'she shall not return to me, but I may go to her.' As if the child would want me there! She'll have her own father and mother, if aught's true! Here she loved me best, and I wanted her! No, I'll have no preaching about resignation." And he strode away, alone.

## CHAPTER XIII

LATE on the night of Bessie's funeral, Martin Crouch presented himself at Miss Owthwaite's door. She had been to look for him many times, filled with terrible forebodings, and it was a relief to her to hear his knock. He reeled against the wall, when she opened the door, and said—

"Will you let me in, or turn me out? It's all the same to me. I'm drunk again"—and he laughed. "Say, go, and I'm off!"

Miss Owthwaite trembled with fear and horror. She was alone; he might become violent, or set the house on fire. But she did not hesitate.

"Come in," she said, as quietly and firmly as she could, "and go upstairs to bed this moment."

Her face and her voice sobered him a little. He let her help him upstairs, muttering all the time, "Yes, I'm a drunken brute, and I'm good for nought but to drink. It's all the same—now!"

Miss Owthwaite put the candle in the safest place

she could think of, locked his bedroom door, and went to her own room, where she knelt for an hour, praying with all her heart for the precious soul of her unhappy lodger.

In the morning Martin came to Miss Owthwaite with expressions of bitter shame, and begged her pardon. But he was out all that evening, and came back in the same, or even a worse condition. The next day he appeared late. His carpet-bag was in his hand, and he asked Miss Owthwaite abruptly to let him know what he owed her.

"You are not going away, I hope, Mr. Crouch?" she said, a quiver in her voice.

"Yes, ma'am; it's time for me to clear out of a decent person's house now that I can't conduct myself respectably. I've got sense left to see that much!"

"Oh, I wish you would not go!" she said, a flush dying her sallow face. "It looks like giving up. Can't you try to keep steady? Unless you want to leave Ernthwaite"—

"Bless you! I thought you'd be thankful to get rid of me. No, ma'am, I don't want to leave the place where my little lass is lying—ever again. But I don't want to disgrace a decent house either—and the drink 'll be too much for me now she's gone. You had better let me cut adrift, for your own sake."

That was not an argument which had ever much weight with Miss Owthwaite.

"Try a little longer, Mr. Crouch," she said. "It's always best to wait and see what the Lord's will is concerning us, and not to do things in a hurry! Please don't go to-day. It would distress me greatly."

"You're very kind to say so," Martin said. "Well, I'll have another wrestle, maybe." And he carried his carpet-bag upstairs.

When he came back to the parlour, where his untasted breakfast awaited him, Mr. Dale was warming his hands at the fire and talking to Miss Owthwaite. She hurried away when Martin came in.

"Has she told you that I've made a beast of myself again?" he began, as he avoided the vicar's proffered hand.

"Miss Owthwaite did not speak of it. But I heard in the village, this morning, and I'm very sorry."

"And you've come to tell me that I ought to clear out of this, I suppose? Well, I thought so myself, but"—

"You're wrong again, Martin. I came to say nothing of the sort. Miss Owthwaite has just told me of your idea that you ought to go, and she wants me to urge you to stay. It would hurt her if you went off so suddenly; and after her kindness to Bessie, I'm sure you don't mean to do that."

"I wouldn't hurt that woman's feelings to save my neck, sir, It was for her own sake,"

"Yes, I understand; but wait a bit. I want you to do something for me before you leave Ernthwaite; there isn't anyone else I can turn to, if you fail me. Drink a cup of tea; and give me some, will you? It's a cold morning, and I've been out a long time."

Martin did as he was asked, but with a sullen and defiant air.

"I'm in a great hurry," Mr. Dale went on, as he drank his tea, "and I've got to go to Lockthwaite and be back at the Hall by 1.30. Can you come along with me, and I'll tell you what it is I want to ask you to do? It will be a real kindness, Martin."

"Look here, sir!" Martin said; "I've never had to do with folk like you and Miss Owthwaite before, and I don't seem to understand what you're both up to. If it's some converting business you are after, I tell you plainly it's no good. I'm not in a humour for any preaching, and if you treat me civil and friendly just to get over me with some d—d religious talk afterwards, you may save yourself the trouble. Them's the true bearings—parson or no parson."

"You're altogether wrong," the vicar said. "Can't you understand that a man may have some human sympathy and feel for other men when they are in trouble and sin, without wanting to preach to them? Are you ready? Come along, then."

As they walked, Mr. Dale told Martin that Jack

Wilson, engineer on one of the lake steamers, had met with a serious accident, which Dr. Tyson said would disable him for some weeks, at the best.

"Poor Wilson is in great trouble," the vicar said, "because he has not been long in this situation, and he fears that he'll lose it altogether. If he had his eldest boy at home, he could have kept the place open for him, Jack Wilson thinks; but they must get a new man now, and perhaps then Wilson won't be taken on again. He has eight children, none of them earning anything but the eldest, and he's gone to Liverpool, and can't help much even if Now, when Wilson told me this last he's inclined. night, I thought of you at once. If you would take his place till he is able to work again, it would be a real charity. The wages are not much. It isn't a situation you would care to have, and the work isn't of the pleasantest. But, you see, you are free just now, and I know of no one else. There would be no difficulty in arranging it, if I write a line to the captain. I know it's a favour, Martin; but it will be hard enough for poor Wilson to get on without his wages; and if he thinks that even when he is better "-

"Dang it, Mr. Dale!" Martin interrupted, "do you think I can't do the job, and let the poor chap have his wages too? It's hard if one seaman can't help another at a pinch."

Mr. Dale did not speak for a moment or two. Then he said, "I seem to hear your little lass whisper, 'Kind Martin.' She would be pleased for you to do that."

Martin pulled his hat fiercely upon his brows, cleared his throat, and said after a pause, "I'll try to do it, sir! But I daren't promise. She kept me from the drink while she was with me; now there's nought to keep me from it, and when the craving's on me, it's the very devil. I don't know that I can help myself."

"Your little lass will help you still. You will not let the work of her short life be lost. She loved you best in the world, and the remembrance of her won't let you drift back to the hell she kept you from. You will not grudge the little one her blessed death, when you have grown used to the pain of losing her; and you will not let your sorrow for her undo the good she did. You cannot, Martin!"

They spoke no more, and soon reached Jack Wilson's cottage. Martin was persuaded to go in with Mr. Dale; but to his modesty, the gratitude of poor Wilson and his wife, when Mr. Dale told them of Martin's kindness, was overpowering; and he made a hasty excuse to leave. The vicar bade the sick man a cheery farewell, and followed Martin immediately, to his surprise.

"I thought there'd be a bit of praying, and reading

the Bible, and suchlike," Martin began, as they walked on.

"If there had, it would have done you no harm to hear it. But I had no time to-day," said Mr. Dale.

"I've had a sort o' prejudice 'gainst parsons all my life—begging your pardon, sir," Martin said; "but it isn't all praying and preaching with you, it seems?"

"Praying and preaching are very good things," said the vicar; "but the best prayer and the best sermon is often a good or kind deed. Look at that poor chap! Could he have listened to the Bible while he was so anxious, and in pain of mind and body? It would have been a mockery. Your promise to see him through this trouble has done him more good than any amount of sermons. By the way, you never come to hear me preach, Martin?"

Martin coughed behind his hand, and his tone was apologetic as he answered—

"No, sir; I've never made a practice of going to church. But if you wish"—

The vicar laughed and interrupted him. "No, I don't wish it, until you are inclined. Don't come as a compliment to me—much better not come at all than that. It isn't a bad practice, in my opinion; but you know what helps you, and what does not. There's another place I should like you to come to, to please me. That's our reading-room. It's not been open long, and the fellows are shy of turning up, at

first. Now a man of your age and position would encourage others. We have chess and bagatelle, and newspapers, and coffee—now and then politics, when a talker comes; but these Ernthwaite folk are not lively, and you would be an immense help to me. Will you come this evening?" They were at the gate of Lockthwaite Vicarage, and Mr. Dale stood still.

"Ay, sir, I'll come!" Martin said. "But"—he hesitated, looked down, and struggled to find suitable words, which ended in—"Dang it! It'll be the devil of a shame to that poor chap Wilson if I don't keep sober, and if I lose the place for him after all. There's nought so queer as folk, I always say—but I didn't know there were parsons of your make. You've not even asked me to take the pledge, Mr. Dale. But if you like, I'll swear to you"—

The vicar put out his hand, and the rare smile broke over his face which made it more than beautiful, as he said, "Martin, do you think I can't trust you without an oath? For Bessie's sake, and for poor Wilson's sake, you'll be man enough to keep right. Never fear! Why, his life, almost, is in your hands! But—if the temptation gets hard hold of you—come along to me. Promise me that... I must be quick. I'll write a line on this. You take it right away to Captain Shaw." He hastily tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, wrote a few lines; and the two men parted.

Jonathan Dale looked at his watch, and his rapid

stride slackened as the house came into view. "Now for a nasty piece of business," he said to himself. "I hope Mrs. Jackson is out—and at anyrate, I must come away in ten minutes, or I shall be late. If she is in—God give me patience! But I think Martin's all right—fine old fellow!"

At all events, Martin was resolved to be "all right." He went to Captain Shaw; got Wilson's place, and kept it. The steady work was his salvation. Every Saturday afternoon he walked to Wilson's cottage with the week's wages, and became a welcome and honoured guest—as was to be expected. Welcome and honour are salutary elements in life. A man respects himself when respect is shown him by others; and Martin Crouch began to feel that he was a not unimportant member of society.

At the reading-room he became Mr. Dale's lieutenant in forwarding everything the vicar undertook—and the vicar's undertakings were manifold. Martin's life had been passed in scenes strange to most Ernthwaite folk; and his fund of anecdote and adventure was inexhaustible. Mr. Crouch's corner was always crowded with an appreciative audience when his yarns began; and the evenings were considered blank when he did not turn up.

He said no more to Miss Owthwaite about leaving. He still spent an occasional hour in her kitchen; and they talked of the little lass, and of her quaint sayings and pretty ways, until the tears streamed down Miss Owthwaite's cheeks, and fell upon her work. Then Martin would thank her for letting him talk about his grief; and when he had gone, she would sit alone, sewing industriously, and praying for his conversion. And though he went neither to church nor chapel, she was not hopeless that a change would come, in the Lord's good time.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE vicar of Ernthwaite's business with the vicar of Lockthwaite was this. Mr. Hunter, schoolmaster at Lockthwaite, had followed the example of his vicar and married an Ernthwaite girl. To please her he had gone one Sunday evening to hear Mr. Dale preach; and liked his preaching so well that he went a second and a third time to please himself.

When this fact came to the knowledge of Mrs. Jackson, who missed Hunter from evening service, and lost no time in calling the schoolmaster's wife to account for her husband's delinquencies, she was indignant, and on her return home, told Mr. Jackson that he must speak to Hunter. It was absolutely insulting of him to go three evenings in succession to hear Mr. Dale preach. "As if your sermons are not good enough for him!" she said.

Mr. Jackson tried to soothe his wife's wrath.

"Oh, I daresay it is only curiosity, my dear! and I really don't wish to interfere with Hunter. He is an excellent teacher."

"That has nothing to do with it. If Hunter goes to Ernthwaite, and gets tainted with Mr. Dale's views, he will not be a fit person to teach the children at all, and would have to be dismissed."

Mr. Jackson hummed and hawed, and said in a deprecating manner, "I hope it won't come to that, Beatrice. I should find it difficult to replace him. We did better at the last examination than ever, and the Inspector"—

"As if secular instruction ought to weigh for a moment against spiritual danger!" his wife interrupted, with lofty surprise. "You don't seem to see the immense importance of his influence over the immortal destiny of these children. If Hunter contaminates them with Mr. Dale's doctrines, the blame will rest upon you. To run such a risk for fear of offending the man, because he is a good teacher, is deplorable weakness."

"But, my dear, after all—these doctrines—I don't quite see the terrible danger"—

"Robert!" Mrs. Jackson exclaimed, letting her sewing fall from her hands in her amazement. "Do you not know that Mr. Dale openly preaches the final salvation of all men, and denies the eternity of hell and the personality of the devil? Do you wish our innocent children to be taught such dreadful heresies?"

The vicar of Lockthwaite was not a brave man.

"Certainly not, my dear! certainly not," he said.
"I will speak to Hunter, and satisfy myself that his own opinions are sound. He won't have got much harm yet."

Mr. Jackson broached the subject to his valued schoolmaster, as delicately as he could. Hunter was a young man of fiery temper, and he had already been roused to indignation by the news that Mrs. Jackson had inquired where he spent his Sunday evenings. He restrained his anger as far as he could, in the vicar's presence; but his little wife got the full brunt of it.

"What right has he to dictate where I shall go on Sunday evening? I give every working day to the school, and take the boys to church Sunday mornings. My evenings are my own, and I'll do as I choose."

"Don't be angry about it, John. We won't go over to Ernthwaite any more," urged the wife.

"Ay, but we will," Hunter said. "I like that parson, and his words give me a bit of a lift for all the week to come. What does it matter to me whether he believes in the devil or not? or to Mr. Jackson either? Isn't my soul my own, I'd like to know? If not, I'll throw up my situation here, and go where there's no Inquisition."

His wife well knew his independent and stubborn disposition, and was deeply distressed. A day or two later, she happened to meet the vicar of Ernthwaite at her mother's home in the village, and told him her trouble, and begged him to help her.

Mr. Dale promised to speak to Mr. Jackson, as, from Mrs. Hunter's story, he fancied there must be some misunderstanding. Nothing could have been more distasteful to him than such interference. He knew that there was little sympathy between himself and his brother vicar; and from the vicar's wife he shrank with an aversion which he could not overcome. But he had promised Mrs. Hunter, and had made an appointment with Mr. Jackson.

As he approached the house, his glance raked the windows with nervous apprehension. There was no sign of the lady. He pulled himself together, rang the bell, and struggled to ask in a cheerful tone for Mr. Jackson. The open door of the morning-room had to be passed. Mr. Dale slunk through the hall, and breathed a sigh of relief when he found himself safely inside the study with Mr. Jackson.

The interview was much less disagreeable than he had anticipated. In fact, marriage had already made Mr. Jackson a sadder and a wiser man. A subtle change had come over him which showed itself in his very voice and manner. He was less complacent, less self-satisfied. He had discovered that, good Christian as he was, his goodness fell far short, in zeal and practical earnestness, of his wife's. He had discovered also that, pleasant as it is to be assured

that your own creed is infallible, and that you are therefore "saved"; and that everyone whose creed differs from yours is wrong, and therefore "damned" (in a theological sense), yet that this pleasure may be dearly bought if to it are sacrificed charity and courtesy.

Mr. Jackson sometimes felt uneasy when he heard his wife enunciate judgments in calm condemnation of half the world—though she said no more than he had often preached. The words sounded harsher, the dogmas narrower, propounded in domestic English at the breakfast-table, than put into Biblical language and unctuously delivered from a pulpit. In these days also Mr. Jackson was compelled to work himself up to such zeal for gospel truth, such propagandism of sound doctrine, in season and out of season, that in weak moments-such as the most robust men knowhe felt that married life has its seamy side. Jackson's two sisters, meek, amiable girls (who would remain "girls" in innocence and submissiveness if they lived to fourscore) had never given their brother a moment's uneasiness by suggesting that he could possibly fall short of perfection. On the contrary, they had admired Robert indiscriminately, from their earliest youth, year in, year out. To admire Robert was the breath of their nostrils; the end of existence.

Now, anyone who has tried it, must confess that indiscriminate admiration is soothing to the soul of

man. There is a cantankerous school which asserts that nothing which is nice is salutary: and disciples of that school might maintain that his wife's exhortations were "better" for Mr. Jackson than his sisters' adulation. There is no doubt, however, which he preferred.

Minnie and Jessie Jackson still lived at the The house was roomy; for Mr. Jackson Vicarage. possessed private means, and had enlarged it; and it was an understood thing that the girls' home was to be with their brother. But it is a melancholy truth that Jessie and Minnie did not find, any more than their brother, that the advent of a bride brought sweetness and light to their home. Beatrice was exceedingly conscientious; strict in the performance of every function which she saw to be her duty, and determined that those about her should be equally strict, equally conscientious. With all these virtues she had not the delicate and priceless art of making people happy.

The atmosphere which surrounded her was bracing to severity. She set herself rather to improve those with whom she lived than to make them happy; and it is a curious fact that while many people want to improve themselves, and a few are even ready to acknowledge their need of improvement, and to take serious steps to bring it about, no one likes to be "improved" by friends. To all those who are gifted

with the passion for improving their fellowmen the best advice is, Content yourself with efforts to improve the benighted heathen, or the lapsed masses, and leave your own family alone.

Beatrice Jackson's case was an example of the ingratitude experienced by those who try to improve their dearest friends. Her rigid attitude upon some questions roused a secret spirit of rebellion even in her husband; and he felt more leniently towards Jonathan Dale because of his wife's severe strictures.

"There's been too much made of the matter, altogether," Mr. Jackson said. "I don't wish to keep Hunter from going to hear you preach. I daresay some of your flock stray over here now and then. We all like a little change. I should not think of dismissing him for such a reason. I know the difficulty of getting a good master too well! Mrs. Hunter has exaggerated the affair. What I really felt a little anxious about, my dear Dale, was, that he should not adopt all your very broad views. You know there are differences of opinion between us."

"Yes; but, I assure you, I dwell little upon doctrinal points in my sermons. I don't think you need be uneasy," said Mr. Dale.

After a few generalities upon the danger of entirely ignoring doctrine, delivered by Mr. Jackson in a perfunctory manner, Mr. Dale rose to go.

"Won't you stay and take luncheon with us?" said Mr. Jackson.

"No, thank you. I have promised to have luncheon at Ernthwaite Hall."

"I'm sorry for that. We should be glad if you would stay," Mr. Jackson said, more warmly, when he saw that his visitor meant to go.

"No, thank you. Mrs. Sylvestre expects me. We are getting into trouble over this right-of-way question, and as she will find the sinews of war if we have to fight, I must consult her about our next step. Mr. Smallman is very resolute not to yield, and the law is a queer labyrinth."

"My dear Dale, I am grieved that you have involved yourself in a quarrel with a parishioner! I wish I could persuade you to give up your opposition. Mr. Smallman has money and position. You are rash and quixotic to oppose him."

"Why not persuade him to give up his opposition to me?" said Mr. Dale, with a twinkle in his eyes. "He did what I believe to be an illegal and arbitrary act, to the injury of the rest of my parishioners. Much as I dislike quarrels, I dislike injustice more."

Mr. Jackson pressed his hand. "As a minister of the gospel of peace, I think you are mistaken in putting yourself forward; and for your own interests"—

They had crossed the hall, and stood by the open door. The sound of a voice fell upon Mr. Dale's ear.

"Excuse me," he broke in, "but I shall be late if I stay another moment. Good-morning!" and he fled.

Mr. Jackson could not resist a feeling of triumph when he turned, and met his wife hastening downstairs.

"Why did you not keep Mr. Dale, Robert? You knew I wanted to speak to him, myself."

"I asked him to stay to luncheon, my dear; but he was obliged to hurry away to keep an appointment."

"I hope you spoke openly and forcibly to him, and told him how strongly you disapprove of his views being spread among us?"

"Quite so, my dear! quite so!" Then Mr. Jackson took up his garden hat, and went to stroll round his lawn, and to meditate upon a sermon on the need of orthodoxy which he designed to preach the following Sunday.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Dale was speeding with a light step and a light heart across the hill which divided him from Ernthwaite. "If Judith were with me," he said to himself, smiling at the happy vision, "I should not be allowed to tear along at this rate. She would make me stand still to listen to the thrushes; she would stoop to look closer at the anemones, even if she did not gather them; she would see a thousand things that I don't see. How

she loves this land, and embodies the very spirit of it! She is made after Wordsworth's heart,—and after mine! Thank God for this gift—that I know her, and love her; that I am near her, see her, hear her, day by day!"

He did not for a moment delude himself with the idea that Judith cared for him; but what had that to do with it? He knew, with the intuition born of love, that she had loved her boy friend, Geoffrey Fielding. But there was little likelihood now that he would ever return to Ernthwaite; and Mr. Dale knew that if the knowledge of Geoffrey's identity with the man who had robbed little Bessie ever came to her, love would change to hatred. She should never learn that fact from him. Still, it might come to her ears, and then he would at least have no rival. So he began to cherish hope. He was often at Ernthwaite Hall, and saw Judith constantly.

Mrs. Sylvestre liked him, and thought that if Judith ever married, she might do worse than marry the vicar. Such an arrangement would be less unpleasant to her, personally, than almost any other. Unfortunately, Judith did not betray the least sign of obliging her friends in this respect.

At luncheon, on this particular day, the conversation turned upon little Bessie. "It is horrible!" Judith said. "When I think of that man who wronged her, I burn with anger. Can't he be punished?"

- "What is the use, now?" the vicar said.
- "Every use. Such a villain ought to be punished! For justice' sake he should be exposed; and no punishment would be too hard for him!"
- "Miss Owthwaite does not know his name, I suppose?" Mr. Dale asked.
- "No," Judith said; "and I am glad she does not. Bessie used to talk about a Mr. Jeffrey a great deal—but it might not be he. I should feel as if I hated the man, personally, if I knew his name. Anyone of the same name I should almost hate. It was such a contemptibly mean thing!"
- "But, Judith," Mrs. Sylvestre said in her unimpassioned tones, "you don't know all the facts. There may be extenuating circumstances. It is absurd to set yourself so violently against an unknown person. The man may still intend to refund the money."
- "Yes," added Mr. Dale; "I hope each day that Martin will hear something from him. There may have been some great temptation to use the money, and the man might yield to it—without being a villain."
- "There cannot be extenuating circumstances in a case like this," Judith said, with warmth. "It was not only taking the money, but abandoning the child to a stranger, that was so cruel. Excuses seem to me quite childish."

"It is never childish to try to see the best side of a question, or of a person," Mr. Dale said.

"There cannot be a best side to a person who could break a promise to a dead woman, and be indifferent to the fate of a helpless child who was entrusted to his care. I wish you would not try to salve over such a sin, Mr. Dale."

Her eyes flashed; but he felt in honour bound to defend Geoffrey, especially to her.

"As Martin told me the story, there was a best side to it. He said the young man had trusted Bessie to a woman, with whom he had fallen in love on the voyage; and she took her to Martin. He no doubt believed this woman would put the child in safe keeping. She was very beautiful, Martin said, and had completely bewitched the young man, I daresay."

"Men are always ready to lay the burden of their sins upon a woman, especially if she is beautiful," Mrs. Sylvestre said. "I really don't think that is a good plea for your client, Mr. Dale; it only makes him out to be weak, as well as wicked."

"Perhaps he is weak, and not wicked," Mr. Dale persisted. "Perhaps he has been in difficulties, and means to do rightly with the money all the time."

"I have no patience with such perhapses," Judith broke in. "What does it matter now whether he means to do right or not? The little one is dead, and it is too late." "Not too late for him to repent, and redeem himself from the sin. It is never too late for that," Mr. Dale said quickly.

Judith smiled scornfully. "Such a villain as he must be will never take the trouble to repent. The treachery, the meanness of it, is what I hate. If anything could appeal to a man's noblest feelings it would be such a charge as was left to him—and he was false to it! People say that no one is altogether bad, and that villains do not exist, except in fiction. Well, that man will always be to me a type of a villain. The cruel uncle in 'The Babes in the Wood' used to be, when I was little. Oh, it is horrible! the man going scot free, with her money in his pocket, and Bessie lying in the churchyard here, among strangers, nursed by strangers, buried by strangers!"

"Wait! wait! We see very little of it yet. Things are righter than we see. Her lot may be much the best," Mr. Dale said gently.

"I should like to see that man punished, at anyrate," said Judith. "It would make me feel more sure that things are right to see him punished." She had her desire when due time came.

Luncheon over, Judith got up. "I must go and feed the dogs, and that will put me in a better frame of mind. There is no fear of their being false and mean; and if they were, no one would take the trouble to find excuses for them, poor dears!"

With this parting shot, she called her collie, Roy,—stepped through the casement out upon the verandah, and ran across the lawn to the stables.

Mrs. Sylvestre and Mr. Dale had to look over some lawyers' communications, and retreated to the library. When a quarter of an hour had passed, the vicar looked at his watch, and then wistfully into the garden.

"I can only stay until three o'clock; and I thought Miss Mordaunt would come back to hear how the fight goes on," he said, as he met Mrs. Sylvestre's half-amused glance.

"If she does not come, I will tell her; she is deeply interested, and very grateful to you, and so am I."

His face flushed as he said, "Most fights are begun for a woman's sake, I suppose. But in this case it is a question of abstract justice. I do not want thanks."

"Perhaps not. But— Mr. Dale, may I speak plainly to you?" Mrs. Sylvestre said. "I know what you want; at least what you would want, if you dared."

He got up, and stood by the window, looking out.

"For my own part, I would rather that Judith never married," Mrs. Sylvestre went on, in her calmest manner, as if speaking of the weather, while the man's nerves tingled at her words. "I think marriage a mistake, from a woman's point of view; but I sup-

pose she is too lovable for it not to happen, sooner or later, and if she must marry, I should like it to be you. It would keep her here, and you would not make marriage a brutal mockery. I could trust you."

"Thank you. But"-

"I know that she does not think of you in that way yet. Only, as it would be pleasant to me, I wanted to tell you that I am, passively, on your side. I shall of course do nothing to help you; but I should not oppose such a marriage. And now that you know this, perhaps you will be a little less diffident. Women like a bold lover, remember."

"It seems to me that she has given her love, once for all. Mr. Geoffrey Fielding is more to her still than anyone else in the world," he said.

Yes, I am afraid so! But how did you know? Yes—Judith is terribly stubborn, and sticks to old friends or old places with a passion of devotion."

"I call it constancy, not stubbornness. It is the most beautiful feature in her character."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Call it what you like. But it will be a bar between her and any new love. Unless we hear that Geoffrey Fielding is dead or married, she will always care for him; even afterwards, perhaps. There would be more hope for you if he had gone hopelessly to the bad—disgraced himself in some base way. That would cure her. Perhaps nothing else will. But I don't think your

chance hopeless; and I recommend more self-assertion. And now I am glad that we understand each other, Mr. Dale. Must you go? Yes, I will tell Judith all about the battle of the foot-path."

He had been gone ten minutes when Judith ran in, aglow after racing round the garden with her dogs. "Has he gone? I'm so sorry," she exclaimed. "I forgot that he had another engagement, or I would not have gone away. I wanted to hear his news, and I have brought him a bunch of sweet violets—for a peace-offering."

"He is not the kind of man who dawdles all the afternoon in ladies' drawing-rooms," Mrs. Sylvestre said. "He is always busy doing something kind and good."

"Yes. He is just a little too good," Judith said, holding Roy's long ears and looking into his loving eyes. "It is hardly human to be so utterly unselfish. It is more like a dog than a man. And when his goodness makes him find apologies for the most detestable sins, it irritates others who are not angelically good."

"You certainly expressed yourself at luncheon with a good deal of irritation. Mr. Dale never irritates me. Unselfishness is too rare to quarrel with when one finds it in a man."

"He does not exactly irritate me," Judith explained; "but I wish he was a little more himself.

One wants a person to be personal. Don't you know what I mean? He is always thinking of and sympathising with someone else. To-day he felt so sorry for the man I was blaming, that he could not look at him in a judicial, straightforward way. Mr. Dale always forgets himself—loses himself. I never think of him as a mere man, with likes and dislikes of his own. But I know he's good—as good as gold; and I'll be very nice to him this evening, to make up for being cross at luncheon."

"This evening? Where will you meet him this evening?"

"At Greybridge schoolroom. There is service there, and I promised to play the harmonium."

"Then you will want the carriage. Have you ordered it?"

"No. I would rather walk. And the vicar will see me safe home again."

"Judith!"

"Cousin Mary!"

"Do you think it is right for a young lady to be wandering over the country at night, with anyone?"

"Not in theory," the girl said, laughing. "But when I am the young lady, and dear Dale (as Dr. Tyson calls him) the anyone, and nine the time o' night, and coming from church the occasion, the most proprietous person in the world could not object—could they, Roy, my darling? Besides—he thinks no more

of walking home with me than with old Betty Robinson, if she could walk, poor soul!"

Mrs. Sylvestre said nothing; but Judith's utter unconsciousness as to Mr. Dale's feelings towards her was not encouraging to his chance.

The night was clear and starlight when the vicar brought Judith home. She was wonderfully frank and friendly towards him; entered warmly into his various schemes; and led him—as a woman only can do—to talk of his own wishes and aspirations. And when, after leaving her, he sat in his study, enjoying the first quiet hour he had found that day, a sense of new reality gave shape to his dreams, and warmed him with a strange glow of hopefulness. Mrs. Sylvestre's words had touched the man's heart to the quick. To win Judith's love—to have her for his wife! Was this possible? so possible that it could be contemplated as a fact by Mrs. Sylvestre?

But to this delicious contemplation Jonathan Dale was not, even now, to be left in peace.

## CHAPTER XV

LATE that evening Geoffrey Fielding had arrived at Ernthwaite. He had Martin's address; but he wanted to see his father first of all. Yet his heart sank. How would his father receive him? No doubt Martin Crouch had come here to claim justice for little Bessie. No doubt his shameful story was known all over the place, and his name scorned by these honest north country folk—as it deserved to be. But his father. . . . Geoffrey never thought of the possibility that he might be dead. It seemed to him that one always heard if people died. It was of his father's grief and shame he was thinking. That the boy, to whom his last words had been, "God bless you and keep you honest," should come back disgraced by the meanest crime! It would break his heart!

Geoffrey went out of the station, and stood by the lake, looking at the unchanged scene familiar to him from childhood. The still water gleamed silver in the cold moonlight, and was a black mystery in the shadow of the hills. The wellremembered outlines of the fells were drawn in long curves against the luminous sky; countless companies of fir trees climbed the ridges, holding their dark spear-like points erect. Clustering groups of laurels, interspersed by glades of sloping lawn, came down to the opposite shore of the lake in patches of black and glistening white. The row of elm trees close to which Geoffrey stood, spread their bare branches in delicate tracery across a moonlit space of water. The mimic waves murmured as they plashed on the pebbles at his feet. One or two stars were brilliant in the sky, and even more brilliant, reflected in the mirror of the lake.

The comforting thought did not come to Geoffrey that sometimes from darkest depths of sorrow the light of heaven is reflected in brightest radiance. He was conscious of nothing but of an aching, crushing sense of shame.

The church clock in the village half a mile off struck eleven, and roused him. His father had always been in the habit of sitting up till midnight, and it was not too late to go home. He walked quickly from the lake, took the well-known path across the meadows into the road, and soon reached the Vicarage. The voice of the little beck, babbling over its stony bed down from the fells behind the house, filled the quiet night, as he entered the

garden. He went round the house to the side adjoining the churchyard. Behind the black yew-trees a few ghostly headstones glimmered, and Geoffrey wondered vaguely how many of the village folk had been laid there to sleep since he went away. There must be some new graves. He did not remember the white cross near the corner of the garden. Half afraid, he looked for the study window. Thank God! there was a light in it, and a shadow on the blind, of a figure bending over the desk in the old place, in the old attitude.

The vicar was startled to hear a knock so late, and hastened to open the door. The servants had gone to bed, and the hall lamp was out. Geoffrey, standing on the door-step, stretched out his hands. "Father—is it you?"

Then Mr. Dale understood. "Come in!" he said, grasping Geoffrey's hand. He closed the door, and led the way to the study.

"Does this mean that my father, Mr. Fielding, is away, or dead?" Geoffrey said hoarsely, looking round the room with haggard eyes.

"Sit down, and I will tell you everything. Mr. Fielding has been dead for a year." The vicar turned his back upon his visitor; stirred the fire; moved the lamp so that its light should not fall upon Geoffrey's face; then he drew his chair back from

before the desk, and went on, as he seated himself: "He failed very gradually. You probably know that he was never a robust man, and that his habits were not conducive to health or long life. But, to all appearance, he did not suffer, except from increasing feebleness. I was his curate for some months, and he gave up parish work long before the end. We all saw that he was sinking, but he would not make any change in his studious habits, and almost died at his desk. He passed away in his sleep one night—a blessed way for death to come."

"Why did no one let me hear, if you all saw that he was failing? Did no one think of me? I might have been with him. I would have come, if I had been given the least warning."

"Mrs. Sylvestre wrote to the last address you had sent, three or four months before he died, to ask you to come back. But there was never any answer, and your father received no letters from you for about a year before his death."

"No, cursed fool that I was! I suppose he lost my address, and when I had no letters from him, I gave up writing, thinking it only bored him. I was always intending to come home, and always intending to write. And now it is too late! . . . Was he comfortable, and cared for, at the last? He did not fret over my absence and silence, did he?"

Mr. Dale answered as gently as he could; but the

truth could not but be painful. He said that Mrs. Sylvestre, Dr. Tyson, and Miss Mordaunt had done what they could for Mr. Fielding, and he watched eagerly to see whether Geoffrey showed any interest in his old friends. But the young man's face was drawn with misery, and he looked so heart-broken, that Mr. Dale longed to comfort him. "It was a blessed end, and your father was lonely and weary. That he is at rest must not grieve you."

"That is not what grieves me," Geoffrey broke out in a tone of agony. "I know that it would be a mockery for me to mourn for his death, when I deserted him, living. It was my doing that he was lonely and weary at the last. But now that I have the means of making him comfortable,—now that I hoped, if there is any hope in me,—to find one person left who would not scorn me,—it is too late! It is this that half kills me."

He got up with a dazed, despairing look on his young face which was infinitely pathetic to the older man, and struggled hard to speak with the stony indifference which is the English attitude in presence of stern sorrow. "Probably it is best as it is. At all events, he is spared the pain of knowing what his son has made of his life. Death is better than shame."

Mr. Dale stood up, and took Geoffrey's cold hand, his voice trembling with the sympathy he

found it difficult to express. "I wish I could speak one syllable of comfort to you," he said. "I wish I could think of anything that would help you. Just now, you spoke of hoping to find one person in the world who would not scorn you. Mr. Fielding, I don't understand how one man can dare to despise another! Sit down, and let us talk about this other trouble of yours."

Geoffrey smiled bitterly. "I should think you might understand, if you have heard what I have done—and I suppose you have. I went to Liverpool, a day or two ago, to look for a man named Martin Crouch, and was told he had gone to Ernthwaite. Do you know anything of him?"

"Yes; he is here still—lodging with Miss Owthwaite, the dressmaker."

"That is good news, at least!" Geoffrey exclaimed, as he sat down. "If I could not have found that man, there would have been nothing for it but to go and drown myself. Now—I can put some of the crookedness straight. The child is with him, I suppose? And Miss Owthwaite is a good soul—she would be sure to take to little Bessie. . . . Is the child all right? Well and happy?"

He had begun to speak more cheerfully, but something in Mr. Dale's face frightened him, and his last words were full of keen anxiety. "Yes—she is 'all right'; but in safer keeping than either Martin's or yours."

Geoffrey sprang up with a cry of despair—"Do you mean to say that she is dead too?"

"Sit down, Mr. Fielding," the vicar said, with quiet authority. "You must stay here to-night—it is too late to go to the inn. Stay, and I will tell you about it. When Martin Crouch brought little Bessie here shortly before Christmas, she was already delicate. He took the tenderest care of the child, and loved her like his own. Our good doctor said from the first that she had no constitution—and she faded painlessly away. Two days ago we laid her in the ground beside your father's grave. . . . Remember, Mr. Fielding, that what is done is irremediable. As men sow, they reap. It is God's law, and a righteous one. You know best whether this child's death, as far as you are concerned, is punishment for sin, or loving discipline. Nav! it is all loving, if we could see aright."

An hour later the two men still sat facing one another. Geoffrey had told his story, and the telling of it—hateful as it was, and little as he spared himself—somewhat eased the strain which had been like iron bands about his heart for days. Jonathan Dale's sympathy had gone forth (running, like the father in the blessed parable) to meet and help

his confession. Not as priest, nor as saint, but as pitying brother, he listened, and strove to comfort.

Geoffrey had little to tell beyond the story which Martin had already told the vicar. On board the Sarmatian he had fallen desperately in love with a beautiful young creature, who called herself a widow. He had absolutely trusted the woman, and had married her at a registrar's office immediately after landing in Liverpool. She had persuaded him to leave little Bessie with friends of hers while they enjoyed their honeymoon; and, getting possession of Philip Dalton's pocket-book, had fooled Geoffrey into the maddest After some weeks of blind blissfulextravagances. ness, he awoke one morning, in Paris, to find that she had gone—with a new and richer lover; that she had a husband living in America; and, worst of all, that what was left of Bessie's little fortune was stolen.

"I keep saying to myself," he said, "in Mephistopheles' words, 'You are not the first.' But I had thought myself too clear-eyed to be deceived by a devil in woman's shape—as so many fools are. I thought her perfect—soul and body. Of course that's over. I am not a victim to despairing love—I can see that I have escaped hell in escaping the lot of being the husband of such a woman. The thought that maddens me is what I did with the child. I have cheated a dead woman, and robbed

the orphan left to my care! I can't believe it even yet! I thought it was lucky that she was left to me. I meant to act towards her with the most heroic unselfishness—and this is what it has come to!... Mr. Dale, how can you talk about a good God, when He permits such a thing? It is a ghastly mockery to talk of a Providence in a world where a man's honour is at the mercy of a mad passion."

The church clock struck two, and Mr. Dale rose. "I have lots of work waiting for me when daylight comes," he said, "and unless I get a few hours' sleep, some of it will be done badly. Come! There is a bed ready. It is one of my theories that the parson's house should always have a guest-chamber ready, in case of emergency." And so Geoffrey was taken to his old bedroom, and soon slept—exhausted by mental sorrow.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE sun was not yet above the hills, the next morning, when Mr. Dale found that his guest had gone out. He followed. Geoffrey was, as he expected, in the churchyard, leaning on the cross over his father's grave, looking at the newly-turned sods near it, where the white flowers were still fragrant, though faded.

The vicar made his footsteps crunch noisily on the gravel. Geoffrey heard him, and moved away from the grave. They exchanged commonplace greetings, and went into the house together.

When breakfast was over, Geoffrey, who had been almost silent, said, "Before I go, I want to ask your advice, Mr. Dale. You have been very kind—I shall never forget your kindness to me last night. Tell me what I am to do with my life. I feel as if there was a curse upon me. I have more money than I want now. An uncle of my mother's has just left me a small fortune—but what good is it? I cannot mix with other men; I cannot look people in the face, as though I were not a traitor and thief. If I could

have made restitution, it would have been different! But now, I can never get rid of the curse. What am I to do?"

"The sin would have been the same," Mr. Dale answered, "though you had repaid the child her money fourfold, and the one thing which is in your own power you have already done. You have had the will to restore what was hers. If the doing of it is denied you, that is no business of yours."

"But it would have made me happier."

"Perhaps so; I suppose you are not to be made happier that way. And don't make yourself worse than"—

Geoffrey moved impatiently. "You see we look at life from different standpoints," he broke in. "I have told you that I can see no signs of an all-wise and all-good Ruler of the world: I did not believe in a God who loved and guided me when I was happy and comparatively good; therefore I cannot believe in a God who punishes me now. It seems to me all a medley of chances, accidents, mistakes, miseries. behaved decently for a time, from natural instincts. I did wrong—wrong I hate to think of now that I have come to my senses—from instinct again; blinded by a passion which I took for love. My father died here in poverty and loneliness; little Bessie died among strangers; and I am left, alive! How can I pretend to believe in a just God?"

"It would be the worst thing you could do—to pretend to believe in Him," the vicar said. "But never mind your belief just now. Yes, we see things differently; so that when you ask me what you should do with your life, I can only answer by telling you what I should do in your place."

"Tell me; but remember what I am—I am not you!" Geoffrey said in a tone of abject wretchedness.

"Mr. Fielding, in God's name I say to you, don't be disheartened beyond measure! You will come out of this a new man. It is the best steel which has had most hammering; the finest gold goes through the fiercest fire. A man who has fallen learns to hate sin as another cannot do, and rises to loftier heights, very often. I dare not make light of your I dare not bid you forget it. But this I know, whether you believe it or not. It is the voice of God —the God who loves you to-day as much as the day you came into the world, the God whose laws you have broken, the God whom you cannot see nor find a sign of—it is His voice which stings you to remorse and wakens your agony of shame. If there is no Eternal Good which you have denied and defied, why cannot you look your fellow-men in the face? right and wrong are mere inherited instincts, why do you feel that there is a curse upon you? Believe this, or disbelieve it, it matters little. Does the father care less for, or cease to watch over the child,

because it is in the dark, and cannot see the hand which holds it? When we cease to be as infants crying for the light, then we know and are at rest. Until then "——

"You all argue in a circle. You say, When you have faith, you will believe; when your eyes are open, you will see. How am I to know that it is not you whose eyes are closed? how am I to get the faith, the sight, which will let me also 'know'? I want to feel sure, as a reasonable man, that the proofs which satisfy you are valid, and that you are not a deluded fanatic."

"Yes," Mr. Dale said, "you are quite right in that. If I. and those who think as I do, act as deluded men, you are justified in so judging us. I should ask no other test for the truth of Christianity. those who most closely follow the example and teaching of Christ do less for the advancement and civilisation of the world than those who follow any other teacher, you may call them 'deluded fanatics.' If, as I hold, Christ showed the way to all that is most reasonable and most lovely in human life, then you should ask no other proofs of the sanity of those who call Him Master and Lord. But let us leave I am not a good talker about what I believe. this. You need not come to me for arguments about the existence of God, any more than for statistics about

the composition of the sun. We were speaking of your life, and what you are to do with it."

"Yes," Geoffrey said gloomily. "Tell me that. To begin with—this cursed two thousand pounds. I have sold some shares, and have the money ready to restore. What am I to do with it?"

Mr. Dale rose, stood with his back to the fire, and was silent for some minutes. Then he said, "Before I came here I had spent ten years in the East End of London. Do you know what that means? It means that every day you see injustices which madden you, sins which sicken you, sorrows which wring your heart because you are helpless to put things right. But money and care can do something."

"You mean that I might give the money to hospitals and charities? Yes, I had thought of that. The child's two thousand pounds shall be given to an orphanage. But afterwards—with myself—what shall I do?"

"Give yourself too. Personal help is worth thousands of pounds. In the big cities is the thick of the fight with evil. Men and women fall daily out of the ranks; new recruits are wanted. If you"—

Geoffrey interrupted him. "You forget, Mr. Dale, I am not the kind of fellow to turn philanthropist, slum-missioner, street-preacher"—

"It isn't preaching that is wanted," the vicar broke in, a smile flashing across his face like sunlight. "It is human loving-kindness and human help that will change barbarism into true civilisation. You can never make reparation to Bessie. But there are hundreds of children adrift on a sea of misery whom you can help to rescue. You can never wipe from your heart the remembrance of your disloyalty to Bessie's dead mother. No; but there are oppressed women in that East End of London whose cause you may champion, whose heavy burdens you may help to lighten; and so, and so only, I believe, redeem your soul, pay back your debt to God, gain strength to bear your punishment like a man, and recover your self-respect."

Geoffrey had winced at the vicar's words; but he listened eagerly, and his eyes caught some of the glow from the light in the other man's eyes. It was impossible not to listen as Jonathan Dale began to walk up and down the room, and describe scenes and circumstances he had known, and things he had tried to do, but failed to do for want of funds and strength. It was impossible not to be moved; and when he paused, Geoffrey said—

"And you really think that I could be any use? that I could do any good? I should not know how to set about it. Going down to the East End and flinging money about wouldn't be what you want?"

"Not quite. But there are plenty of capital organisations now, — Toynbee Hall, the Salvation Army, the Church Army, the Oxford House,—all

calling out for young men such as you to come over and help them. You are an Oxford man, are you not? Jack Russell, a great friend of mine, is at the Oxford House. He's a splendid fellow—perhaps one of your 'deluded fanatics,' but a grand soul for all that. He would thank me if I got you to go up and help him. He is a regular demon for work, the other fellows say, and won't stand shirking or skulking if a man undertakes anything for him. Shall I give you an introduction to him? He'll soon put you on the right tack."

"Wouldn't it be a sort of hypocrisy?" Geoffrey said hesitatingly. "Isn't there a lot of Church business about those places?" Yet there was a ring of renewed hope in his tone.

"You need not live at the House, nor go in for any of the Church business," Mr. Dale said. "There's emigration, for instance. Russell is very full of a scheme for preparing men and lads at home, looking out suitable land in Canada or New Zealand, and getting them to emigrate in an orderly way; not helter-skelter, as if one was tumbling rubbish out of a barrow on waste ground."

Geoffrey's face brightened. "Yes, I could help there. I've seen a good deal of the Colonies, and I have a good many notions about emigrating. I might have a try at that life—before I chuck up the sponge. And if I break down—why, one can put an end to it all any day."

"You won't break down. I tell you you are wanted at that work. Your strength and knowledge—and, yes, your money too—are wanted. Your fellow-creatures want you; God wants you. You have to make up for the past. Don't forget that—nay! I know that you cannot forget it. And then, in time, be sure you will come to know what the Master meant when He said, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these little ones, ye have done it unto Me.' Wasn't that a divine thought, binding us each to each and all to Him?"

Geoffrey, instead of answering, went to the window and threw it open, saying, "May I? This air is like life when one has been breathing London fog all the winter."

It was a bright March morning. The sunshine turned the grass to gleaming emerald; the golden and purple crocuses in the borders opened their petals as if in joy that spring had come. The thrill of the thrush's song fell through the music of running water upon Geoffrey's ear with strange pathos. All was familiar to him. He only was changed.

"Mr. Dale," he said suddenly, looking up with an expression of boyish confidence in his sad face, which went to his listener's heart—"do you honestly think that I can ever be tolerably happy again? Do you think I shall ever be able to endure the thought of myself, and of what I have done?"

"Yes," Mr. Dale said. "When you have forgotten yourself—lost yourself—in the sight and love of the Goodness which we call God, against which you have sinned. When you see that—see and love Him—you will be able to say with the man whom we call a heathen, 'No harm can happen to a good man, in life or death.' And you will know, as he assuredly knew, the peace of God which passeth knowledge."

## CHAPTER XVII

For the next six months Ernthwaite has no history. Neither Mr. Smallman nor the vicar made progress in his wooing. The foot-path dispute reached a crisis, and was settled by law in favour of the public. Mr. Smallman submitted with a very bad grace, and spent many pounds in fixing barbed wire fences on either side of the path which he was obliged to leave open through Dingle Hill wood.

As is usually the case, many of the people who had grumbled most when the path was closed, now said it was of little consequence, and that it had been bad taste of Mr. Dale, a new-comer, to make an enemy of Mr. Smallman. After all, landlords had rights, and it was not the clergyman's part to rouse quarrels in a neighbourhood. The vicar became unpopular—except among the poor. The "good families" up and down the country side shook their heads over a parson who was broad in his theology and socialistic in his politics.

In October, Mrs. Sylvestre had an attack of pleurisy, and Dr. Tyson ordered her abroad. Ernthwaite was cold in the late autumn, and he feared lung trouble unless she was careful. Reluctantly she yielded, and to the joy of both girls, invited Gladys Tyson to go with her and Judith. It was arranged that Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith were to spend a week in London with Judith's step-sister, and that Gladys should join them there. The day before they left Ernthwaite, Gladys and Winnie walked over to the Hall, and on the way, Winnie gave Gladys some sisterly advice.

"I don't know that it is much use," she said, "because I have always observed that people never take advice. I don't myself. Still, it seems to me a kind of duty to say what one thinks about everything. Beatrice says I have no right to give advice, nor to have opinions, because I am young. Now, I think that is absurd. I am sure that young people's opinions are worth far more than old people's, because they are so much more natural and to the point. I always know my own mind instantly. I could give an opinion on any subject—fairly set before me—in ten minutes, or on any picture, or poem, or piece of music."

"But, perhaps, all the same, your opinion would not be worth having," Gladys said, laughing.

"Oh yes, it would. That is just where people

make such a mistake. First thoughts are best. Young people say spontaneously exactly what they think; older people consider, and temporise, and let in side lights, and turn the thing over, and are influenced by everyone else's opinions, until they lose all power of judging on the real merits of the case itself."

"Well, but if we are not to be influenced by anyone's opinion, what use is it for you to give yours?"

"To a certain extent, of course, we must listen to various opinions," Winnie said; "but I am only showing you that my way of looking at a thing is much more natural, and therefore more likely to be right, than mother's, or Beatrice's, or Mrs. Sylvestre's. About Mr. Smallman, Gladys, I must say, I think you are treating him badly."

"Nonsense, Winnie!"

"It isn't nonsense. I never talk nonsense. And before you go away, I will speak my mind for once. Why in the world can't you accept him?"

"Because I don't want him, and I have refused him. I am not likely to have another chance, so let it be ended." Gladys spoke determined words, but her pretty mouth was irresolute, and she plucked a bit of hazel from the hedge, and played with it impatiently.

"You know quite well that it isn't ended. He won't give you up for one refusal—plucky little man!

and you might accept him before you go away, and let it be settled that way. Oh, Gladys, it would be so nice to have you at Dingle Hill, rich and jolly! Why don't you? There is no one else for you to marry, and there isn't likely to be anyone else here. Of course, now you are going to Italy, you will see new people; but while you are away, Mr. Smallman may see someone else too, and get married. And then, suppose you come home without being engaged; you will have to settle down here again, and wait until you are thirty, and marry a fat old vicar, if there should be one."

"I shouldn't mind waiting till I'm thirty to marry a man I really cared for," said Gladys, with a flush on her fair face.

"Oh yes, you would," Winnie said, with confidence. "It was different for Beatrice. She was made for a clergyman's wife, but you are not. Of course you mean Love. But it's no use sitting still and expecting something romantic to happen. Nothing happens here. In all my life, nothing has happened worth calling happening! Real life isn't a bit like novels, and you must take it as you find it. Heroes don't turn up ready made for every pretty girl. just fancy what it will be if we four all grow up old Maud won't marry; she is too busy to maids! Muriel won't; men don't like clever think of it. women—not to marry, I mean. And I do not intend to spoil my career by marrying—unless it were another Tennyson, or a great artist. I could not blight the life of a great man by refusing him, and should sacrifice myself, and be contented with his fame."

"I think it is very unkind of you all to try to tease me into marrying a man I do not love. It is wrong, too, and horrid. You are all making my life quite miserable," Gladys said.

"No, it is not unkind of us," Winnie persisted. "You are a girl who must have nice pretty things, and comforts, and money, and all that. You would be really miserable if you were poor. And we are getting poor. George has had a lot of father's money to set him up-father said so the other day; and we have had expensive educations. If you would marry Mr. Smallman, it would not only be one more provided for, but think how nice it would be for all He is awfully kind, and would let you do And then he is a great deal in Manchester, and you would have that delightful place to yourself, and I could come and stay with you, and "-

"That's a nice reason for marrying a man—because he is away from home so much!" Gladys interrupted. "I tell you, Winnie, I cannot love him, if he is made of money."

"O!" Winnie broke in. "As if that matters! Do you suppose Beatrice loved Robert Jackson before she married him? I don't think Mr. Smallman is

half so bad—I mean so disagreeable to think of marrying—as Robert, nor as lots of other men. I don't like men, as a rule. But one has to make the best of them."

"I wish he would ask you!" Gladys said.

Winnie threw back her head. "I am quite different. Art is the end of my existence. Oh, it is hard that I cannot have any proper training for want of money, when I have the gift! Lots of girls, not half as clever as I am naturally, go to London and work at the Art Schools, and get on, even without talent. For of course teaching can do something; and I feel my own weakness in technique, and-and that sort of thing. If Beatrice were not so stingy, I do think she might give me just one term at South Kensington. daresay Mr. Smallman would, if he were my brotherin-law—he is richer. And then, not being a clergy-And people man, he could travel and go about. often take their wives' sisters, for company. noticed that very few married people like to be always going about with each other. Of course it must grow monotonous, Oh, there are such possibilities if you would only accept him, Gladys! There are no men about here, but clergymen; and they are always poor, and have great disadvantages of all sorts."

"A clergyman's life is beautiful, I think," Gladys said, with regret, as of something beyond her reach, in her soft voice.

"Beautiful! How can you profane such a word, Gladys?" said Winifred scornfully. "But you have no æsthetic sense; and yet, you are going to Italy. How crookedly things do run in this world! You won't half appreciate what you see; while I could have helped Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith immensely at the picture galleries. I'm very glad you are going, of It will be a splendid treat for you; but it would have been an inestimable advantage to my artistic development—a phase of life you and Judith know nothing of. You two are utter Philistines, and vet you get to Italy! But it seems to me the same all round in real life. Look how people fall in love with the wrong people. Now, there's Mr. Dale—anyone can see that he worships Judith-and she only likes him in a casual kind of way, and has never cared for anyone but Geoffrey Fielding."

"Oh, Winnie! how do you know those things?" Gladys cried, looking with a startled glance at her sister's keen, animated little face.

Winifred smiled. "Can't you see it too? Mr. Dale would do very well for Judith; the commonplace life of a vicar's wife in Ernthwaite would make her quite happy. But she does not 'love' him, as you call it. Then there's Mr. Smallman adoring you—and you won't look at him. It is stupid!"

"It is a pity you cannot arrange the universe more to your mind," Gladys said, with unwonted sharpness.

They had arrived at the Hall, and as they walked up the drive, Winifred sighed. "Yes! there are a good many things I should improve," she said. sorry the Hall will be deserted all the winter, for one thing. I always like to come here. There is a distinction about the house—about the look of the rooms—which no other place has that I ever saw. It isn't done for show. The drawing-room does not look like a stall at a bazaar. The harmony of the colours is soothing; and there is something beautiful whichever way you look. Nothing jars the æsthetic sensibility."

Her dissertation was interrupted. Roy sprang through the trees, and jumped up at Gladys's side for her caress. Judith appeared the moment after, a bunch of scarlet hips in her hand, twisted up with a spray of fine-leaved, brown-veined ivy, and a frond of pale gold bracken.

"There, Winnie!" she said, giving them to her.
"Paint that if you can!"

Winnie looked critically at the bouquet. "Nature uses such crude colours," she murmured, half to herself; but the other two did not answer, for Judith was talking eagerly.

"I call it shameful; and of course no one can stop this. It is his own property. But think of it! Just that lovely part of the road, where we get such a beautiful peep across the dip in the dingle to the hills and the open country! And the old low walls are so delicious. I always sat on the wall there, and thought how pleasant it was to have it the right height to sit upon. Oh, I could cry when I think that it will never be the same any more! It is wicked for people to spoil this beautiful world."

"What is the matter?" Winnie asked.

"Mr. Smallman is building a wall eight feet high, for about half a mile, on the road between here and Dingle Hill. I suppose it is to spite us all. It makes me miserable. If you see him, Gladys, before you leave, can't you persuade him to give it up, or to keep it low, if he must have a new wall?"

"I can't think why you and Mr. Dale worried so about that foot-path, and made Mr. Smallman angry," said Winifred. "You will have to set Mr. Dale to preach against the wall, now. It is absurd to tell Gladys to harass herself about it."

"Mr. Dale is as much distressed as I am. We have just been past the spot together. And, oh, Gladys! how ill 'dear Dale' looks! Has Dr. Tyson seen him lately, or spoken of it? He is working too hard, or something is the matter!"

"Father is here," Gladys said, stooping to pat Roy's long silky coat. "You had best ask him yourself. See! his gig is at the door."

The three girls went in, and found Dr. Tyson with

Mrs. Sylvestre. "I have been waiting for you ever so long, you vagrant!" he said to Judith.

"She thought it her duty to stay in with me for two whole days," Mrs. Sylvestre said, "and so now she has to make up for it. You must not scold her. She has really been a good nurse."

"Besides, I must go and say good-bye to the whole village!" Judith said, with a forlorn air.

"Excuses—excuses!" said the doctor. "You are a born vagabond, and ought to live in a travelling van. Now, listen to me! You two girls are not to think that this is a pleasure trip got up for your amusement. It is to be a seriously conducted piece of business."

"Are we to promise not to enjoy anything, and never to laugh till we bring Cousin Mary safe back to you?" Judith said.

"You are to be as careful of her as if she was made of glass."

"Don't frighten us all, Dr. Tyson! I have never been ill in my life, and I don't feel as if I should be it now," said Mrs. Sylvestre.

"I don't mean you to be ill, if I can prevent it. Beware of any exposure to cold or damp, Judith. Never let her be out after sunset, and stay away till the end of April, at the earliest."

"Oh! we shall miss the spring!"

"Why, child, there is spring in Italy, I suppose, as well as in England."

Judith joined in the laugh against herself, and said, "I know it is absurd. Of course everyone says spring is unendurable except on the Riviera; and I will put up with it—if it makes Cousin Mary quite strong again. We will be superhumanly careful of her, and perhaps get a bit of pleasure too now and then, won't we, Gladys?"

"Don't get too fond of foreign places—or of foreigners. We shouldn't like some French Mounseer to come over here after you," the doctor said.

Judith made a little grimace.

"She is hopelessly provincial, Dr. Tyson," Mrs. Sylvestre said, "and won't admire anything that is un-English."

"Yes, I am just a plain English girl, and don't pretend to be anything else."

"You couldn't, my dear! They don't grow girls like ours abroad. They may beat us in climate, and in champagne"—

"Oh, and in art and music!" Winnie interrupted.
"You know we are dreadfully behind the French in art, and the Germans in music. If you went to a Wagner concert"—

"Thank you, I would rather not, chatterbox," her father said. "I should ask, like your friend Browning, 'Where the dickens is the music?' One of Beethoven's symphonies, played by my girls in my own parlour, is music enough for me."

- "But, father dear, Beethoven was German," said Gladys.
  - "So he was. But his music has got acclimatised, and seems our own."
  - "I wish you could come with us," Judith said. "It would be so nice! Or if you could join us in the spring, and take a holiday, for once!"
  - "Who would do my work—kill off the superfluous population, and get the babies born into this naughty world—eh, Miss Judith? It's all very well for irresponsible folk like you to be gadding about staring at Madonnas, and gaping at scenery."
  - "But, father, all that is culture!" cried Winnie.
    "Oh, how I wish I were going!"
  - "Well, I should like it too. It is thirty years since I went to Paris. When my ship comes in, Winnie, you and I will set off, and show them how to travel."
  - "Everyone but me travels nowadays!" she sighed.
  - "'Patience, cousin, and shuffle the cards.'" The doctor rose as he made his favourite quotation, and held out his hand to Mrs. Sylvestre.
  - "Good-bye. Ernthwaite won't be like itself while you are away."

There was an unusual softness in Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes as she held his hand, but no word of regret at the parting, on her lips.

Judith went with the doctor to the door.

- "It always makes me miserable to leave you," she said mournfully.
- "Nonsense, nonsense! Think of all the fine things you are going to see and do. And May will soon be here!"
- "Yes—but so many things might happen before May!"
- "True, O maiden! Many things might happen before next week. Good-bye, my dear."

As Judith kissed her old friend, he saw that there were tears in her eyes. He patted her shoulder and kissed her a second time. "You need not be so anxious, Judith. Mrs. Sylvestre will soon be well. I have no fear about her."

"It isn't that—but I don't like saying good-bye to you for such a long time. I like to think that I am going to see you again to-morrow, and every to-morrow!"

Dr. Tyson laughed, and got into the gig. As he gathered up the reins, he looked down upon Judith with his quiet, kindly smile.

"My dear, whether you like it or not, there will come a time when you cannot see me to-morrow, nor any to-morrow! Good-bye. Come back to us with the swallows."

When he had gone, Judith remembered that she had not spoken about Mr. Dale.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith had gone. Ernthwaite seemed strangely deserted to most of the persons who take part in this little history. Even Gladys, though she was soon to join them, felt depressed. Sunday after their departure was one of the soft, golden days which now and then come to cheer the autumn gloom; and as she strolled round the garden paths, listening to the chime of the church bells, and looking at the last dahlias and marigolds, she began to think with a new reluctance how many Sundays would pass before she would hear the music of these bells again—walk through the wood to the old church, and listen to the simple teaching of her father's friend, "dear Dale." She was vexed with herself for allowing such feelings, and turned with a smile to greet her brother George. He had come down unexpectedly to spend Sunday at home. Gladys was his favourite sister, and she had an immense admiration for him.

"Not coming to church, I suppose?" she said, looking

reprovingly at his pipe and slouched hat, and slipping her arm through his.

"Certainly not," he replied. "Even if I approved of church-going in the abstract, I am sure this parson of yours is a fool, because of his quarrel with Smallman. By the way, Gladys, what is all this about your having refused Smallman? It isn't true, is it?"

"Oh dear! I am sick of being scolded and worried about Mr. Smallman," Gladys said petulantly. "It is—'Why don't you marry Mr. Smallman?' 'How naughty you are not to marry Mr. Smallman!' from morning to night. Beatrice lectured me yesterday, and Winnie, and now you begin. Can't you understand that a poor girl wants to love the man she marries—a little?"

Her brother smiled in a superior way. "So you will, of course, after you are married. It is the natural thing. But the necessity of loving before marriage is an old-fashioned notion, my dear girl—fast disappearing with other effete superstitions—what we may call the childish ailments peculiar to the infancy of the human race, but which we have grown out of."

Gladys opened her eyes very wide. "George! what do you mean?"

"I mean that to marry, to unite oneself by a legal tie, for life, ought to be a purely rational and business transaction, and has nothing to do with love, which is a temporary, physical, hysterical, or, in some cases, sentimental, condition—the less thought of the better. If I made the laws, I would prohibit all writing of novels and poetry for this reason. They encourage the superstition of love."

"George!"

He laughed, and whiffed a cloud of smoke into the clear air before he went on. "But marriage is another thing. It ought to be looked on entirely as a matter of convenience and a means of advancement. For a girl, it is the one recognised step to promotion, to fail in attaining which is a disgrace. ought to marry judiciously—with due consideration of the chances of domestic happiness, and, above all, of improving one's social status. Do you suppose I should ever dream of marrying any woman, unless it would be a distinct gain to me—socially and financially? Very few, either men or women, can afford to humour their fancies in this respect. Certainly you and I cannot."

"Oh, it sounds so wrong to talk of marrying in that way—merely for money. It is wicked, George!"

"Nonsense, my dear child! nothing is wicked—in your sense. You religious people are singularly inconsistent. You call it a sin to sacrifice your foolish little loves, and yet you praise as the noblest of virtues all other self-sacrifice. Now, broadly speaking, that

theory of self-sacrifice is the most harmful fetich which foolish men ever bowed down to. The one real sin a man can be guilty of, is to injure himself or another, if he can keep from doing that without selfinjury. Serve and help yourself first. Develop your talents and your health; increase your own knowledge and your own powers—and then look round and do the same for the rest of humanity as far as you can. There is no abstract Right. What is good for us is That is the highest wisdom, and therefore the Right. only true religion. If more people followed that teaching, we should soon see an immense stride onwards in the direction of prosperity, health, and, necessarily, happiness."

"It doesn't sound nice," Gladys said, shaking her head. "What would become of the sick and weak, if no one thought of them until—afterwards?"

"They would die out, my dear—the most blessed of all possible results. Every organism which cannot correspond with its environment must die out. The process may be painful, but is inevitable, and, in the end, beneficial." George here paused to nip off a poorly developed blossom of a monthly rose, and, crushing the sweet pink petals into a mass, threw it behind the bushes.

"There are some people," he went on, "who wear themselves to an early death, or premature old age, and even reduce themselves to poverty (a worse evil than death), for the sake of 'other people.' This parson of yours is one. It is easy to see that he is killing himself. Now, what is the sense of that? What possible use could his death be to anyone? His life may be; and the only right for him, as for us, is to keep himself strong and prosperous. If such a type of character as his became common, where would progress be?"

"There is not much fear of that," Gladys said, with a touch of scorn.

George laughed. "Happily! But I wish you could come to see seriously, Gladys, that to think it is wrong to marry without love is childish and countrified; and that to marry without money would be a much greater sin."

"Oh, George!" was all Gladys could say, but her cheeks burned, and there were tears in her eyes. They turned a bend of the garden walk at that moment, and saw Dr. Tyson coming towards them.

"Tell your mother I can't come to church with you, after all, Gladys," he said. "I've been sent for. Tom Hebblethwaite's baby is dying, and I must be off."

"If the child's dying, what good can you do?" said George. "Or is it an interesting case?"

"No. But the poor folk don't die easy unless the doctor has been, and Tom's wife would think something might have been done. There isn't the ghost of a chance for the child. It's been in convulsions, they

say, all night, and it was a miserable scrap of humanity from the first."

"Then why in the name of common sense give yourself that long drive?—and a labourer's child too! No fee — waste of time and horseflesh"—George began.

Dr. Tyson interrupted him, a look of pain in his eyes. "In common charity I can't look at it as you do, George, so say no more. I may be able to lessen the child's suffering, and that will help the poor mother to bear her loss."

George raised his eyebrows, and smiled. Gladys put her hand into her father's, and they all went towards the garden gate, where the doctor's gig waited for him.

"I am sorry you must go, father," Gladys said.

"So am I. Dale generally throws out a word or two which makes life easier and work seem of more worth. Tell him, if you see him, that I will drive him over to Greybridge to-morrow, to see about that river pollution he is so anxious to put a stop to."

"I see you've got a new horse," George remarked, and went up to examine the animal.

"Ay. He is a bit nervous; but that will mend. Old Polly is pleasanter to drive; but I must spare her as much as I can, and it's a stiffish pull up to Hebblethwaite's."

"I wish you could spare yourself," Gladys said, as she helped her father to put on his topcoat, and then brushed off a speck or two of dust. As she stood close in front of him, his keen eyes rested on the unusual trouble of the fair girlish face, and he put his hand under her chin and looked at her.

"Eh! what's this? Tears, lassie! What is it all about?"

She crept closer to him. "Father! George says there is no real right or wrong!"

"George is a very clever fellow, my dear; but if he says that, he talks confounded nonsense. Is there real light, or real darkness? We have got to walk by the light given to us; and woe be to us if we shut our eyes to it. Is that all that frets you, Gladys?"

"Father! he says I ought to marry—anyone who is rich, whether I love him or not; and that I am selfish to refuse—anyone because I don't like him."

The doctor laughed, and patted her cheek. "I don't know a better reason for refusing anyone, my dear! George is getting too deep for old fogies like me! Never you mind him. You shall refuse whom you like, and stop at home with me."

He kissed her tenderly—more tenderly than usual, she liked to think afterwards. Then he joined George, who was examining critically the new horse's knees.

"What do you think of him?"

"Sound enough! Not much to look at; but for the country he will make a good, strong beast. You had best look out coming down the brow; it's a nasty bit; don't forget that Polly isn't in the shafts to-day."

Dr. Tyson smiled as he took his seat. "Old Polly spoils me as a driver. She knows the roads better than I do, and I should be ashamed even to hint to her that there's a nasty bit coming."

He glanced down at Gladys with a cheery smile; waved his hand gallantly to his wife, who had just appeared at the door, dressed for church—and drove away, the mellow sunshine full on his ruddy brown face, and the church bells pealing merrily. His wife and children stood looking after him, and the elderly man in trim Sunday garb who had brought round the gig, touched his cap, and moved off.

- "Why doesn't John go with him?" George said.
  "It would be safer, and look better too."
- "He does sometimes," Winnie answered, "but not on Sundays. Father says he ought to have a holiday. We girls go with him sometimes. Why didn't you go?"
- "In that? I have some respect for myself, child! Gladys, there's a fine instance of the absolutely useless self-sacrifice I was speaking of. Can't you see the folly of wasting all the morning over a visit for which he won't get a penny of profit? That's the kind of thing which has kept him poor, and "—
- "And that's the kind of thing," Gladys interrupted, "which makes everyone who knows him, love him."

.....

"Rubbish!" ejaculated the superior person, with contemptuous emphasis, as he went into the house, and proceeded to spend a delightful morning, reading the descriptions of the latest experiments upon living animals by an eminent physiologist.

Dr. Tyson arrived at the labourer's cottage whither he was bound, after an hour's drive. His presence gave peace and strength to the weeping mother. He spoke a few kind words; then, in a quiet and unhurried manner, did what could be done to soothe the sufferings of the dying baby; gave careful directions for its treatment, and left.

"Thank you kindly for coming, doctor," said Tom Hebblethwaite, who was holding the horse. "I knew you could do nought for the bairn. But it seems to comfort the women-folk to know that all's been done as ought to be done. She'll not take on so bad now. There's five others,—all nicely, and this 'll be the first we've buried,—so I don't see as 'ow we need grumble."

Tom Hebblethwaite was the last who spoke to the doctor.

No one knew exactly how the accident happened; but when two of Tom's boys were coming up the steep brow from Ernthwaite church, where they sang in the choir, they saw the doctor's gig standing empty by the side of the road, the new horse munching the short mountain herbage; and a few yards farther up, the doctor himself, lying among the heather and bracken, his face turned upwards towards the sunshine with his usual quiet smile. They thought at first he was not much hurt, so easy was the attitude, so peaceful the expression of the face. But his head had struck upon a sharp ledge of rock, and he must have died instantly—too suddenly even to jar the sweet current of his thoughts. And all Ernthwaite, and all the country-side round for miles, mourned the loss of the true friend and physician, who had given his life for others.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was a month after Dr. Tyson's death. The first flush of painful excitement had passed; the first burst of sympathy had died down; and now the full realisation of their loss came home to the widow and children, with its sickening sense of This is the really hard time to utter desolation. live through, not the earliest days of bereavement. When the old routine of life has to be faced once more, and the old cares to be met, then comes the sharpest sting of sorrow; and when, as in the present instance, there are money-difficulties, each day makes the burden heavier; the aspect of neighbours towards their afflicted friends insensibly changes; advice is poured into the still open wound instead of sympathy. "What can I do for you?" becomes "People must learn to help themselves." The once soft-hearted sympathisers shake their heads, stiffen their backs, and mutter, "We all have to bear our own trials. There is certainly a time to weep with

those that weep; but there is not much time." Also there is not only truth in the old proverb that "fat sorrow is better than lean"—but average people treat fat sorrow with more respect than lean sorrow. If Mrs. Tyson and her daughters had been left hand-somely provided for, George and Beatrice would not have assumed the half-disapproving attitude towards their mother and sisters which they now began to display.

George had been very kind and considerate at first. He had been shocked out of his cynicism by the blow of his father's death, and had shown himself an affectionate son and brother, for a week. Then he had been obliged to go back to London to attend to his own interests; but he was now at home once more, anxious to wind up his father's affairs, and to arrange for the future.

Beatrice had shared the grief which had fallen upon the happy home, with natural and loving sympathy. She had been devoted to her mother, and had spared her in every way she could. But gradually, as the condition of the doctor's money matters came more and more into sight, her words savoured less of consolation and more of admonition. Gradually she resumed her old habit of dictation to the rest of the family; her counsels of religious resignation began to be sprinkled with suggestions to Gladys and Winnie that they ought to think what they could

do to make themselves independent, and that fretting over trouble was rebellion against the decree of Heaven.

A family council was held the day after George had returned, in the once cheerful drawing-room of "Nineteenth Century Villa," at which were present Mrs. Tyson, George, Beatrice, Muriel, and Winnie.

Gladys had not gone to Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith. She was broken down with grief; and felt that it would be impossible to leave her mother so soon, and impossible to enjoy anything. She had gone out to avoid the business discussion, which was horribly painful. She had a new anxiety also—Mr. Dale had begun to be ill with typhoid fever, the day after Dr. Tyson's funeral, and was in a critical condition. How could she sit and listen to this wretched, sordid talk of ways and means?

There was a melancholy change in the appearance of the old room, which had always been gay and pleasant even in its well-worn shabbiness. The piano was closed; the canary had been carried away; there were no flowers, no books, no trifles tossing about. The black figures, the dejected faces, were in tone with the dingy furniture and the sombre light of the dull November afternoon.

The widow sat before the fire, in the sad dignity of her swathing crape and floating cap streamers; her comely prettiness was weefully altered by the ceaseless tears which reddened her mild blue eyes. She put down her handkerchief now and then to look helplessly at Beatrice, while George endeavoured, as he said, "to put things plainly before her"; but when he asked her to express her wishes, she only shook her head. She was one of those women who lose all individuality when happily married-who are simply wife and mother, and have no separate existence. George stood on the hearthrug, his back to the fire, and "put things plainly," with considerably more sharpness in his tones than if said "things" had been pleasant to contemplate. Dr. Tyson had died a poor man. His practice was not, at any time. lucrative; and he had been generous, with that spontaneous generosity which gives with both hands, and takes pleasure in giving; not ostentatiously in big sums, but as a daily habit, in a constant stream of unrecorded, untalked - of kindnesses and gifts. family had been expensive; he had grudged them nothing; and only this last year he had paid a large sum of money to secure a promising medical partnership for George.

"I can't understand how my father, as a business man, could consent to find that money for me," George said, in an injured manner. "If I had known what I know now, I should never have agreed to it. It must be some years before I can make enough to compensate you for the loss; and

except the insurance money, there is literally no provision for you. I thought my father had more business capacity."

"Oh, George! he was an excellent business man; everyone said so, always, and nothing could be done properly in Ernthwaite unless he took the lead," Mrs. Tyson said, swallowing a sob. "And he never worried me about business or money matters from the day we were married. When I wanted money, he gave it me, without a disagreeable word! I'm sure I never knew such a man for parting with his money pleasantly. Your Aunt Jane's husband never gives her a shilling without grumbling, and wanting to know what she does with it; and he is a rich man. Your poor dear father would just empty his pocket and say, 'Take what you want,' he was so generous and "-But the end of the sentence was lost in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Generosity isn't business, my dear mother! He kept no correct accounts of his visits, except to a few houses. I can't find out what money is owing to him, and there must be various small sums, which would be useful."

"No," Mrs. Tyson said; "he never would keep an account against the poor people. He used to say—you must have often heard him say it, Beatrice—that he knew they would pay him when they could; and he couldn't bear to think that they might be forced

to find the money some day, when it would be hard upon them. He wouldn't like me to trouble them to pay, George!"

"But that's nonsense, in your circumstances, mother. I have just told you how little there is. The sale of the furniture may bring in enough to"—

Mrs. Tyson's hands trembled, as she raised them with a gesture of dismay.

"Oh, George! I can't have the furniture sold! We bought this drawing-room suite when we were married, and though the covers are shabby, the legs are as good as new. They've been kept in good order. There isn't a mark on the rosewood card-table, except where you kicked it once, in a passion, when you were four years old, and had been quarrelling with Beatrice. And we chose everything together, and I'm sure your father wouldn't like me to part with anything."

George pished and fumed impatiently, and looked at Beatrice, who sat on the sofa, knitting "comforters" for her missionary basket. She came to the rescue.

"My dear mother, you know you cannot afford to remain in this large house, so what could you do with the furniture? It will be a trial, no doubt; but we must not set our hearts on earthly things, and after all, tables and chairs"—

"But, Beatrice, there's the dining-room sideboard which your father took such a fancy to at old Dr.

Crossthwaite's sale; and the girls' piano, which he chose himself, in London. And my feather-beds, just done up new, and "——

"My dear mother! try not to dwell on that side of the question. Debts must be paid; and we must decide what is to be done for the best, for you and the girls."

"Leave me out," Muriel said, looking up from the table, where she was writing a letter. "I have accepted the situation offered me at a High School in Birmingham, and shall go after Christmas. Of course I will do what I can to help; and Maud may be able to spare something. I know she will, if she can."

"Yes, you and Maud have each a living in your own hands," George said. "Every woman ought to have, to be prepared for such an emergency as this. But Gladys and Winnie"—

Winifred was standing listlessly near the window, but on the mention of her name, she came towards the others, and her eager face flushed as she said, "I have never had the chance of preparing myself to earn a living. Only give me a chance, and see if I cannot make not only money, but fame."

"Nonsense, child! Do you think there is any money now to throw away on your whims? The question is, how to keep a home for mother and you," George said angrily. But Winnie was not silenced.

"I think that is nonsense. Where is the difficulty? You have taken a house in London, and you are getting into practice. Surely you could take one of us to live with you. And Beatrice has a large house, and mother could live there. And Gladys must get married, and then it is all settled."

A dead silence followed the girl's vehement speech. George shrugged his shoulders, glanced at Beatrice, and turned round to stir the fire. Beatrice waited till he had put down the poker, to say severely, "It is very unbecoming for you to dictate to George or to me as to our domestic arrangements, Winifred. hope I shall not fail, and have never failed, in my duty to mother. But my husband has the first claim upon me. I should not dream of proposing to bring a member of my family, as permanent inmate, into his house. No one who knows me will doubt my willingness to contribute, as God has blessed me, to the support of my mother. But I consider that you and Gladys should realise your responsibilities also." Beatrice closed her lips with energy, and went on knitting.

"I don't think Winnie's suggestion is altogether foolish," Muriel said thoughtfully. "It would be nice for mother to stay near her old home. And George needs someone to keep house for him. Why not, just for the present?"

"It wouldn't do at all," George interrupted. "I

must have a free hand to begin with; it would be fatal to my prospects to be hampered with one of the girls, or with my mother. Of course I will make it up in other ways. I have no intention of being selfish or neglectful. But I have my way to make in the world. I wish you could have done something, Beatrice; but of course you know your own affairs best. And Winnie is quite right about Gladys. Why on earth won't she marry Smallman? Mother and Winnie could live with her, for a time."

"Yes," Winnie put in eagerly. "Mr. Smallman would do anything she wanted—anything! And he has been awfully kind all this time. He said to me that he looked upon me as a sister; and he has bought my orange and ginger-pot picture, and he admires my work immensely! I wish you could persuade her, George!" George shook his head, and Winnie went on. "Well, you speak to her, Beatrice. She says she doesn't love him. Do you think that ought to stop her, when it would be so convenient for everybody if she married him?"

"Personally, I approve very highly of Mr. Smallman," Beatrice said, evading the question. "I think him a true Christian; and his position is all that could be desired for Gladys. Mr. Jackson said to me only yesterday that Gladys is very foolish and wrong to refuse such an offer."

"Gladys is quite right," Muriel said. "Why cannot the poor girl be allowed to please herself?"

"Of course she will please herself," George said.

"Girls don't get forced into marriage in these days.

Where is she?"

"Gone to ask after the vicar. But it is getting late. She ought to be back." Muriel went to the window, and peered out into the deepening dusk.

"What is the matter with Mr. Dale?"

"Haven't you heard? He's dying of typhoid fever," Winnie answered briskly, with the eagerness to communicate bad news which young people usually exhibit. "He caught it at Greybridge, they say—looking after some river pollution he was very angry about. He has been delirious for three days."

"Poor fellow!" George said. "I thought he looked ready for anything, the day of the funeral. Overwork has made him susceptible. What folly it is for men to throw away their lives!"

"He is always interfering in things which do not concern him. Greybridge is an out-lying hamlet, and the river is as much in our parish as in his. He would insist upon fussing over the drainage, and making everybody uncomfortable, and this is the result. It is particularly sad in his case, for I fear

he is little prepared for the awful change. I have heard him say that he believed the only preparation needed for heaven was a good life on earth."

"An awful heresy, indeed!" George sneered. "I'm sorry he is dying. I liked the man."

"He may pull through," said Muriel. "Yesterday was the twenty-first day, and there were better symptoms. Here is Gladys!" and she ran to meet her.

"George, do tell her what we all want her to do!" Winnie exclaimed. Gladys came in as the words were spoken, and stood among them, swinging her muff carelessly.

"What do you all want me to do?" she said.

"Oh, the old story, I suppose—accept Mr. Smallman?

I will, if you like. I knew I should, in the end.

And now, perhaps, you will all be satisfied, and not worry me any more about my duty."

George's heart smote him at the sound of her weary voice and the sight of her white, sad face. He put his hand on her shoulder. Gladys was his favourite. She was pretty and amiable. Perhaps she might come to live with him.

"No one wants to worry you, my dear girl! Don't decide in a hurry! It's for your own sake we wished it," he said, as kindly as he could.

"I have decided for my own sake," Gladys said, throwing herself into a chair; at will be all the

same a hundred years hence, and I am tired of talking about it."

There was a pause; then Muriel asked if she had heard how Mr. Dale was.

"Better. They say he will live now—the worst is over," she said, and, rising, left the room.

## CHAPTER XX

It was not caprice which had led to Gladys's sudden change of front, though it looked like it. The girl had often been tempted to yield to persuasion. was much easier to her to go with the stream than to battle against it; and she was far from insensible to the solid advantages which a marriage with Mr. Smallman would bring to her and to her family. His persistent wooing, in spite of her coldness, his ostentatious display of sympathy on her father's death, and the tangible proofs of it which he was eager to pour upon the household in the shape of game, fruit, flowers, were not without effect upon her. Gladys recognised the fact that the possession of money means ease and luxury, and the power to confer favours; and she knew that all this goes a long way towards making life happy. But she had loved Jonathan Dale ever since he came to Ernthwaite, and so long as there remained the dimmest hope in her heart that he would ever return her love, she could not consent to become Mr. Smallman's wife. When the vicar seemed to be at the point of death, she loved him more than ever, and almost believed that she hated her rich and persistent suitor.

On this particular day the news at the Vicarage was more reassuring, and Gladys went on to share it with Miss Owthwaite. Besides, there was something wrong with the fit of her new dress, and it was no use to look "frumpy," even if one was broken-hearted. When Miss Owthwaite opened the door, she burst into tears. The sight of Gladys always set her weeping now.

"May I come in? Don't cry! He is better!" Gladys said. "The nurse thinks he will live now."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the little dressmaker.

The kitchen was cosy and cheerful as usual, and Gladys was easily persuaded to draw a chair to the tea-table. "And turn up your dress, miss, to save the new crape. For these and all other mercies and blessings we give Thee grateful thanks, O Lord!" she murmured devoutly, with closed eyes, and then went on—"Eh, dear Miss Gladys! It has been a terrible visitation, this illness—coming just after losing your dear father too! But I believed all along, even at the worst, that he would live. It was borne in upon me that the Lord would answer our prayers. Martin—that is, Mr. Crouch—used to come in quite downhearted, and say that all the decent folk died, so no

wonder the world was such a bad place. But I never could give in to that, and there's been a great outpouring of prayer that this life might be spared, in chapel as well as church."

"Do you really think that makes much difference?" Gladys said. "I have prayed and prayed for a thing, and it doesn't seem a bit nearer than before I began."

"Perhaps it isn't the Lord's will that you should have it; but I am sure that He likes us to ask for what we want, and I should be miserable if I thought it made no difference. At least, it makes all the difference to me, when I have prayed for a special blessing, whether it is granted or withheld."

"And you really think he will live?" Gladys said.

"Yes. It has been my conviction all the time that his work for the Lord isn't done. And I feel as if we had none of us valued him enough. We've just made use of him. Everybody has sent for him here and there, and never thought that he was only flesh and blood like the rest of us. Human nature couldn't stand it, and the Almighty has sent this illness to tell us so. Then, you see, poor man, as well as helping to bear everyone else's trouble, he has had his own."

"What do you mean, Miss Owthwaite?"

"I'd like to tell you, Miss Gladys, dear, because it seems to me that you might do some good, though it looks like gossip, and suchlike. Is your tea right?" Miss Owthwaite paused nervously.

"Oh yes, thank you. Tell me what you mean!" "Well, it's this way. People may laugh as they like at heartaches. But there's nothing tells upon the strength and health more, Miss Gladys, than to set your heart on someone's love, and not be able to get it. I hope you'll never know the truth of what But I've seen it in Mr. Dale's eyes this year I say. back; and I've heard it in his voice if he ever chanced I saw plain enough that it to mention her name. was all on his side, and sometimes I hoped it was only my foolish fancy. But now I know."

"I don't see how you can know, Miss Owthwaite," Gladys said, with a little irritation. "It is so easy to imagine that kind of thing."

"Yes; but Martin has been sitting up at night with him, to help the nurse, when he was delirious, and he says it has been just heart-breaking to hear him rambling on about her, hour after hour, and sometimes crying out for her as if he was dying because he couldn't see her. Eh dear, it was pitiful to hear him tell!" and Miss Owthwaite's eyes filled with tears of sympathy.

"Whose name? Did Mr. Crouch say whose name?"
"Oh yes, Miss Gladys. That's what makes me so sure now. It was 'Judith, Judith!' over and over again. Martin said he would have gone for her and brought her to the bedside if she'd been at home

(because of course he knew it must be Miss Judith),

and he felt as if Mr. Dale would die just for want of the sight of her. It's a strange dispensation, Miss Gladys. If we didn't know that the Lord does all for the best, we might be sinful enough to think we would have ordered things differently if we'd had the power. If Miss Judith could only have cared for him! Perhaps I oughtn't even to say so, but you don't mind me speaking of it to you?" An odd, drawn look on her visitor's face checked Miss Owthwaite, and made her uncomfortable.

"Oh dear, no—if it's true; but are you sure it is true?"

"Why, what else could it mean, the poor man calling for her and craving for her like that? And I couldn't help the thought that maybe you could say a word to Miss Judith—you're her friend, and just a hint of it might set her to thinking of him differently. Not that I would interfere with the Lord's will; but I've been praying that something might bring her to care for him; and then, when you came in, Miss Gladys, I thought you might be an instrument in the Lord's hand to bring it to pass."

Gladys was silent. The dressmaker felt that in some way what she had said hurt Gladys. She looked at the sweet face, with the expression of pain so new to it, and was silent until Gladys said, "What was Mr. Crouch there for? He is not the person to nurse Mr. Dale,"

A flush dyed the dressmaker's sallow face. "Indeed, you don't know, miss, what a tender nurse he can be. His manner may be rough at times, but he has a wonderfully tender heart, has Martin. When little Bessie was ill, you remember how he nursed her, don't you? And he's that polite and kind in his ways to me, sometimes, if I'm not as well as usual, and he can do anything for me—I might be a lady."

"But I thought, Miss Owthwaite, that sometimes"— "Oh, people have been too hard on Martin Crouch," Miss Owthwaite interrupted, speaking with unusual decision. "There's no denying that at one time he wasn't quite as steady as he might be; but, the Lord be thanked! he's got over it; and it's cruel to cast it up against him, even in our minds. Indeed, Miss Gladys,"—here the dressmaker dropped her voice and spoke solemnly, evidently awed by her own temerity,—"I have come to believe—the Lord forgive me if I'm wrong—but I do think that there's worse sins than intemperance. I think that a man might even be a strict teetotaller, and be less a man after God's own heart if he was hard and vain-glorious, than poor Martin, who doesn't set himself up for anything. I dare not say it to our chapel folk, but when I've seen a strong man like Martin Crouch fight against an appetite for drink and get the better of it, with no one to help him; and when I see, day by day, his kindness to them who need help,

I am sure the Lord must make allowances for him—and ought not we, too?"

Gladys had hardly been listening, and when Miss Owthwaite paused she only said, "How did Martin come to be with Mr. Dale? You have not told me,"

"It was this way. He was so anxious one night that he said he couldn't come home and go to bed, and he asked if he might stay at the Vicarage, in the kitchen, in case anything should be wanted. And in the middle of the night poor Mr. Dale got violently delirious, and the nurse asked Martin to go up and help her to keep him in bed. And then, she liked Martin,—and the vicar seemed to like to have him,—and he was there four nights, Miss Gladys, without any rest at all!"

There was silence again for some minutes, the loud ticking of the eight-day clock and the singing of the kettle were the only sounds.

"Martin was sure it was 'Judith,' always 'Judith' he called for?" Gladys said at last; but when Miss Owthwaite began the story over again, she stopped her. "I must go now. Yes, of course, Martin must have been right, if he was there all that time. Thank you for the cup of tea. It is so refreshing! Goodbye, Miss Owthwaite."

"Good-bye, Miss Gladys dear! And if you should see your way to saying a word, or dropping a hint, as friends can, you know, to Miss Judith"— "Oh yes! If I can, I will. I shall not see her yet,—but I won't forget,—and he is not going to die now, so he can wait."

There was a hardness in her voice; her cheeks were burning, and Miss Owthwaite reflected that sorrow had changed her dear Miss Gladys sadly.

As the girl walked the short distance between Miss Owthwaite's house and her home, she made up her mind. Hope was killed, and her heart felt like lead. There was nothing for her to wish for—to live for. If he loved Judith in that way, he would never, never think of her!

She wished vaguely that she could die, or thought she wished it. But perhaps it would answer the purpose as well to put an end to her present life by marrying Mr. Smallman, she reflected. Everyone would be pleased; and, perhaps, in years and years, she might come to be happy again.

So Gladys went home, and rejoiced her family by coming to her senses at last—as Beatrice remarked. When, the day following her engagement, Mr. Smallman presented her with the loveliest diamond ring ever seen, it cannot be denied that it was a real mitigation of her trouble; and that, before long, the consultations with Miss Owthwaite about her trousseau, were not without consolation to her broken heart.

## CHAPTER XXI

MRS. SYLVESTRE and Judith did not go back to Ernthwaite in the spring, as they had intended to do. The thought of the place without Dr. Tyson was painful to them; and Gladys's marriage to Mr. Smallman came to Judith as the snapping of her girlhood's friendship.

"It is horrible!" she said. "I can't think how you can hear the news so calmly."

"You look at it onesidedly, as usual," Mrs. Sylvestre answered. "Gladys was always easily led. She has been persuaded into it, no doubt; but if she can tolerate his vulgarity, she will be as happy as most women. He will be very kind to her. I assure you that is a great advantage in a husband."

"She did not love him," Judith said impatiently, "and there is no other excuse for marrying. To marry because he is rich—the idea sickens me!"

"You would be wiser to moderate your expectations from your friends. They are not necessarily heroes and heroines because you think they are; and then, when they act according to their nature, not to your fancy, you are disappointed. Gladys likes to do what is easiest; and there is no terrible fault in that."

"I don't want heroism. I only want common honesty, and to be above doing things from mean motives," Judith reiterated. "Gladys cannot love Mr. Smallman!"

"She has only acted after her kind," Mrs. Sylvestre said, half amused, half vexed at Judith's vehemence.

"I always hoped in my own heart that she would marry our dear vicar," Judith said, with a little sigh. "It does not matter a bit that he is plain and so much older, when he is so good."

"I should think not. But he never wanted her."

"I think, in time, he would have done. I used to wish I could give him a hint; but he isn't the kind of man to fall in love with anyone!"

"My dear Judith, you are the most provoking girl!" Mrs. Sylvestre said, as she left the breakfast-table, and strolled to the open window. "And your ideas about marriage, and falling in love, as you call it, are as crude as a schoolgirl's. I sometimes wonder what will become of you, when you set up a romance on your account."

"Oh, I have had, and ended, my romance!"

Judith said, laughing lightly; but as she too stood

and gazed at the magical blue of the Mediterranean, there was a quiet steadfastness in her grave grey eyes which contradicted the mocking tone.

"That is nonsense!" said Mrs. Sylvestre. "I wish I could impress upon you, what I often say, that all life is a compromise. The wisest people are those who most readily acknowledge that fact."

Judith slipped her hand through her cousin's arm, as they stood side by side, and leaned her cheek against hers for a moment. There were not many demonstrations of affection between these two women—there was no need. Mrs. Sylvestre kissed the hot cheek pressed to hers, and said, "Don't make yourself miserable about Gladys; and don't judge people harshly. It is not wise to set your ideal too high."

"All the same, you would not like me to grovel. You would rather that I even broke my heart in stretching up to unattainable heights. Don't shake your head. You shall not contradict me."

Ernthwaite being therefore under a cloud, they spent the summer in Switzerland, and in October arrived in London, and took rooms there for a few weeks. The concerts, theatres, and exhibitions, which do something to compensate for the meteorological conditions of a London winter, were thoroughly enjoyed by Judith; and her step-sister, Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith, was delighted to have an opportunity of letting the girl see "something of life." Time passed in the

country she considered to be "mere existence," unworthy a rational creature. She did her utmost to persuade Judith to stay for the spring and to be presented, and so become a duly accredited member of society. She could hardly believe her ears when Judith said that unless the Queen could fix some other time of the year for her Drawing-rooms, she must for ever forego the honour of kissing her hand.

Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith was an excellent person; not remarkable in any way, but a type of a prosperous, well-meaning woman of the world. She was handsome, and always well dressed; she was agreeable in manner, and kind-hearted. She derived infinite pleasure from her position in life—a position which she thought the most desirable in the world. possession, and, still more, the expenditure of her ample means was a real and never-satiating source of enjoyment to her. Her costly house in South Kensington, her costly carriages and horses, costly clothes, costly entertainments, pleased her exactly in proportion to their cost. Cost was the test of value in her eyes. It was not the beauty nor the usefulness of anything which made her desire it, but the cost.

She had known no sorrow and no real disappointment in her life; and her complacent countenance bore no lines of endurance, and told no story of patience or of pathos. In other words, she was not an interesting woman. No one can be interesting who has known unbroken prosperity from childhood to middle age.

Her husband was every inch a banker—heart and soul a banker; that is all that is necessary to say about him. Judith used to say, when she had been to the Grosvenor-Smiths, that after an exchange of greetings and polite inquiries as to health, and so on, her conversation with her brother-in-law came to a dead pause; she believed that they would never have anything further to say to one another until doomsday. She was not very fond of going to the Grosvenor-Smiths; but could not always decline to do so. Her step-sister's children were still in the nursery and the schoolroom; and Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith liked to take Judith about with her, although she did not entirely approve of her.

"You know, Mary," she said to Mrs. Sylvestre one day, "a girl ought to be something more than merely 'a nice girl' in these days, if she is to be a success. No one notices a girl if she is nothing else; and if she gets no notice, what is to become of her? Judith is a dear girl; I don't deny that. She is natural, and good-tempered, and easily pleased, and a very pleasant companion. But, you know, hundreds of girls are all that! Judith is not artistic. You can't call her music much above the average. She is

not an 'emancipated' woman, thank Heaven! and she has not gone in for religion, or philanthropy, or science, or anything. Of course it would not matter if she were a great heiress, or a great beauty. Really, I don't like to say it, but as it is, she is almost commonplace, and that is fatal!"

Mrs. Sylvestre smiled. "Your words are honey to me, Caroline! That was always my aim! To be commonplace is to be happy."

"I don't understand you. How is she likely to attract, and to make a good match? It is hopeless, living where you do, unless she meets someone here."

"Now you make me quite happy," Mary Sylvestre said. "I am glad you think Judith unattractive, for I was afraid someone might admire her, and tempt her into matrimony."

"That is only your fad," Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith said, with smiling confidence. "Girls must marry. It is a slur upon them not to do so. Judith is twenty-two. It is really getting serious."

Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith therefore insisted upon Judith's presence at her entertainments, and gave her a spell of the quiet gaieties which prevent society from stagnating, even in November. The main element in Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith's "circle" was what may be called the upper-commercial; among it was a sprinkling of professional and artistic men, and

here and there it touched upon higher "circles," and annexed a few members of the aristocracy. Titles were not uncommon at Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith's dinnertable, and yet not sufficiently common to have lost their piquancy—to the hostess at least.

Judith Mordaunt, with her north-country exclusiveness and provincial prejudices, hardly appreciated this privilege enough. She was accustomed to a different, though perhaps not more rational, order of social merit than obtains in town. To her "the best people" were "the old standards"—the families belonging to the soil. Farmer Owthwaite, whose ancestors had held and farmed the land about Owthwaite Hall for generations, and whose cousin was the dressmaker, had in her eyes a more honourable position than the first Baronet of this, or the second Earl of that. The country girl was therefore not in the least dazzled by the magnificence of the mansion in Wellington Gardens; nor did she for an instant waver in setting Ernthwaite far above London in her heart.

This deeply-rooted love was made the subject of constant banter by Judith's step-brother, Tom: of whom she was nevertheless very fond, and whose house she liked much better than that of the Grosvenor-Smiths.

Tom had always made a pet of "little Judith" in the few years of their home-life together; and whenever they met now, still he made a pet of her. He never seemed to realise that she was "grown up," and entitled to opinions of her own; he was amused by what he called her very original tastes, as one is amused by a child's prattle, and loved to draw her out upon town and country life, with good-tempered amusement at the arguments he never dreamt of answering.

It was Tom Mordaunt's way only to laugh at everything which he did not himself accept as truth. His own creed—social, political, religious—was comprised in the fewest possible formulas, and held lightly, but unchangeably. It was too much trouble for him ever to think of changing his mind; and still worse to think of attempting to change any other person's. He believed in a quiet life; and he believed in London. It was impossible to induce him not to look upon Mrs. Sylvestre as a brokenhearted widow who had buried herself, as a sacrifice to her husband's memory, in the solitudes of Ernthwaite. That seemed to him the only possible explanation of her conduct. His belief in London was probably the strongest opinion he held upon He was fond of his children, and any subject. fond of his wife; and though the latter bored him a little, he was never impatient with her, only good-humouredly indifferent to her numerous hobbies.

Mrs. Mordaunt was alive to the finger-tips, and might have absorbed all her husband's store of natural curiosity—so eagerly interested was she in every matter in heaven and in earth and under the earth by turn. The steadying influence of an exceedingly matter-of-fact husband, and the disabilities consequent on maternal duties, alone kept the airy spirit of Lydia Mordaunt from the wildest flights. American by birth, and the contrast between the excitable, sensitive, erratic little woman, ever on the tiptoe of eagerness to snatch some new experience from the untried stores of knowledge, and the stolid Englishman, endowed with an unusual supply of mental inertia, was an endless amusement to Judith, who took her London life and London friends not at all au sérieux, but as a show at which she was for the time assisting.

One morning, when Mrs. Sylvestre and Judith were still at breakfast, there was an impatient tap at the door, and Lydia rustled into the room, with apologies for coming so early.

"I was afraid of not finding you, Judith, so I made Tom let me have the brougham first, and I must be back in ten minutes, as he wants it. So tell me quickly. Will you come and dine with us this evening? You must come. I won't ask Mrs. Sylvestre. She doesn't mind being left, I know, and she would not enjoy this affair."

Mrs. Sylvestre shook her head deprecatingly.

"What is it to be this time, Lydia?" Judith said.

"Let me know, to get the subject up a little. Is it those archæologists, for I have found a big book all about cromlechs and runic characters, and I will read it, so as not to disgrace myself?"

"Oh no!" Lydia said, smiling. "I went quite far enough into archæology. It is the present, not the past, that really interests me. We ought to study social questions more, we women. Don't you think so, Mrs. Sylvestre? Especially now that we vote for something, I forget what—Parliament, or Local Boards, which is it?"

Judith looked rather blank. "But what kind of social questions, Lydia? Not politics? I hope you don't mean politics!"

"No, my dear! I got sick of politics too, when I found how the thing kept chopping and changing. You couldn't even get the men placed on their own sides, before you found you were all wrong, and they had shifted, somehow or other. Politics isn't an exact science. You have to read those odious speeches day by day; and keep making up your mind which man is the patriot, and which the traitor, over and over again."

She stopped to take breath, and Judith said, still with a shade of reluctance, "'Social questions' sounds so very vague. Now if it had been heraldry again,

I have got all those names off by heart, and should not mix up fesse and bar, and charge and tressure, as I did the other evening."

Lydia, who was still standing at Judith's side. patted her shoulder and laughed. "This will be far It is to be about the Conmore interesting, my dear. dition of the People, and the Labour Question, and the East End, and the Living Wage, and all that kind of Oh, you can't think how delightful it is, when you know something about it. But I'm afraid of Tom thinking the dinner rather dull. The table looks so bad with nothing but black coats round it; and one can't ask hospital nurses and sisters of mercy, you know. You must come. He is a charming man, too!"

"Who is charming?"

"Didn't I tell you? Mr. Russell, the man whom I want to exploit this evening. He lives down in the East End; but I met him yesterday at his sister's—Mrs. Danvers' drawing-room sale for East End Missions. And such a dear young fellow was with him, and he promised to come too,—but I forget his name. I am going to take up the East End. Mr. Russell says there is endless scope for the influence of cultivated women. But I want facts and statistics first. One cannot plunge into things without some knowledge of the true conditions. Oh, I must fly! You will come, Judith!"

- "Yes. But"—her tone was not enthusiastic.
- "That's right! Good-bye, Mrs. Sylvestre."

Judith went downstairs with her sister-in-law, who talked all the way to the carriage.

"You can't think how interesting it is when you take it up, Judith, this East End! I have promised to play at the recreation evenings, and to have a drawing-room meeting for some charity -I forget which; and you must come with me to the People's It is so important to solve the problem how to elevate the masses—whether by culture or religion; whether by giving them more music or more money. I incline to the side of really high art -Burne-Jones, you know, and all that kind of thing. But then, of course, the soup-kitchen is not to be despised in bad weather. I shall be able to decide better after to-night. Oh, and I forgot-Tom says the young man I liked so much, who is coming with Mr. Russell, hails from your own north country, so you will be sure to like him."

And in a whirl of talk and excitement, she tripped into the carriage, and the pretty face nodded "Goodbye" as she drove away.

## CHAPTER XXII

"You will have a terribly dull evening," Mrs Sylvestre said. "Don't you envy me, toasting my toes and reading a new novel, instead of pretending to be interested in paupers and criminals?"

"I can't pretend," Judith said; "that's the worst of it! But it may not be so bad. Perhaps some of these men may have known our 'dear Dale,' and for his sake, I am interested in the East End."

"Perhaps, when you get there," said Mrs. Sylvestre, "you will find that Lydia is full of hypnotism or Mormonism, and has forgotten the East End. Be prepared."

Judith smiled as she stood drawing on her long suède gloves. "She has done both of those. Don't you think she is very amusing?"

"No. I find her more exhausting than amusing," Mrs. Sylvestre said. "At my age one can enjoy intellectual activity, but not intellectual gymnastics; and to be called upon to make a mental somer-

sault every few minutes, in order to follow Lydia's vagaries, does not suit me. You are young, and can get amusement out of everything. That dress is far too pretty for a dismal affair of this sort, my dear!"

It was only a white cashmere gown, but Judith looked well in it; and the bunch of yellow chrysanthemums at her breast—flowers which had been sent from the conservatories at Ernthwaite Hall — took away the severity of the plain, clinging folds. The erect, supple figure, the well-placed head, the clear radiance in eyes and complexion, and, above all, the noble simplicity and directness of her manner and expression, made Judith—at least in Mrs. Sylvestre's opinion—a very attractive woman. In spite of Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith's strictures, she had no doubt that Judith must be admired; and heartily hoped that at least none of those East End men would find the girl as charming as she did.

Judith, Mrs. Danvers, and Mrs. Canon Benett were the only lady guests at Mrs. Mordaunt's dinner-party. Judith was introduced to Canon Benett, whose name she of course knew in connection with the modern Church and People movement, and was delighted to find that he had been a close friend of Mr. Dale's.

"Yes; Dale was a splendid worker, but, unfortunately, he is one of those provoking fellows who insists upon trying to kill himself with work. With

ordinary care he might have been among us still. But he would not follow my advice and my example," said the hearty, robust Canon; "and for his sins he is banished to some Sleepy Hollow, where his rare gifts are thrown away upon inappreciative country clowns, and where he must be miserable."

"Oh!" Judith exclaimed. "This is too bad Canon Benett. I assure you some of us struggle our utmost to make Sleepy Hollow endurable to him; and that we all appreciate him. You do not know that his Sleepy Hollow is Ernthwaite—my home!"

Canon Benett apologised meekly. "But though I withdraw all accusations and all condolences," he went on, "I think the right place for our best men is here—I grudge them to the country livings."

"And I think that is very unkind," Judith answered. "If our sleepy villages get wakened up, it will surely be better, both for us and for your dreadful cities. Mr. Dale finds plenty to reform, plenty to fight against—even in Ernthwaite."

Tom Mordaunt strolled up to his sister, as she spoke, and caught the last word. He rested his hand on her shoulder, and smiled good-humouredly as he said, "This extraordinary young woman will not even allow that London people amuse themselves more, and more rationally, than country folks, Canon. Did you ever hear such heresy?"

"There is nothing like the originality in an ordinary assembly of Londoners, that you would find in an equal number of country people," Judith said staunchly. "You must own this. If you want a comic character on the stage, you are obliged to get one from the country, and laugh at his eccentricities. We have the comic characters every day."

"But, Miss Mordaunt, think of the original ideas which have their rise in the brilliant give and take of London society," said the Canon; "the lively criticism of life which is drawn out by the contact of various minds. What have you in the country in place of that?"

"It always seems to me," said Judith, "that there is a marvellous sameness in this brilliant London talk! I always seem to hear a few catch-words or phrases, which one person echoes after another. If we in the country read a few magazines, and glance over the leading journals, we can know exactly the fashionable opinions on all subjects, and could join in the thick of London society talk without the least risk of being behindhand."

"Judith! you are incorrigible!" Tom laughed, as he moved on to welcome a new guest. Presently they went in to dinner.

Canon Benett continued his defence of London life, and Judith gaily disputed it. "The country dull?" she exclaimed. "Oh no! It is these endless

streets which are dull. A walk on the fells or through the woods has some interest at every step. In town, unless you stand and stare in at the picture or china shops, there is nothing to do, but to avoid being jostled."

"But nothing happens in the country. You have nothing fresh to talk about. You meet the same half-dozen people day after day, and know all they have got to say about everything. In London, one meets strangers every day, and something happens every hour."

"So that you don't get half the excitement or delight out of an accident or a scandal that we do," Judith said. "The most thrilling events are wasted upon you, while we are stirred to our very depths by a wedding, or even by the prospect of one."

"And you forget, too," said the Canon, "that in London one is called upon to exercise one's critical judgment over some new thing, or upon some remarkable personage, day by day. In the country, your environment, as one may say, never changes, and your critical faculties must become atrophied for want of use."

"But in London," she retorted, "everyone plays at follow-my-leader. It is ludicrous to lookers-on. All London goes mad for a month about some mock hero. Where was the critical faculty when you Londoners were all on your knees to—but it would be invidious

to pick out one name. Now we in the country arrive very slowly at any opinion; and having arrived, we are immovable."

"But is that an advantage? Is it not better to hear many sides of a subject, to be ready to move to another standpoint? better to be in a swiftly-flowing current than in a stagnant ditch?"

"Ye—es, perhaps. Only you never know to what whirlpool the stream is taking you. Even I—and I do not meet many people—seem to be losing all individuality since I lived here. Everyone has some pet scheme, or new religion, or all-important theory of life to push down my throat. No one ever wants to know my ideas; no one seems to think I can have any, as I live in the country. I am becoming perplexed, and soon I shall not know what I really think about anything. Really, I would rather go back to the ditch, and be my own stupid self, with ideas of my very own."

"I cannot believe you would let your particular ditch be stagnant," he said gallantly.

"I should not mind being converted, if people kept to one thing. But the constant change"—She stopped abruptly.

"Well, I cannot deny that indictment. Londoners are fickle. But do you think stolidity necessary to constancy?"

Judith did not answer, and Canon Benett, glancing

up from his plate, saw that his companion had turned from him, and that a bright flush dyed her cheek and neck. He waited a moment, and repeated his question.

"I beg your pardon. Oh yes, you are quite right," Judith answered vaguely. But the Canon felt that somehow or other he had lost his companion's interest, and that her attention was irrecoverably astray.

She made several heroic efforts to hide her distraction, but with little success. The sound of a laugh had struck suddenly through the low clatter of voices round the table, and had silenced for Judith every other sound. It was five years since she had heard that light - hearted laugh—on the summer evening at the edge of the Ernthwaite woods, when Geoffrey Fielding had kissed her, and laughed as she fled from him. She listened breathlessly. "Yes, those were great days, Tom," she heard him say. "But you were an awful bully, in a quiet way, when I was your fag." Then Tom laughed too, and began to recall some schoolboy episodes.

Judith, until now, had hardly noticed any of the company, except Mr. Russell, who sat next to Lydia, and whose keen, dark countenance could not be overlooked. Opposite her the guests were strangers; next but one to her she saw Geoffrey Fielding. Judith dreaded that he should recognise her during

dinner. Her heart beat with joy and pain. Geoffrey was in England—in London—alive and well! And yet he had not made any attempt to see her and his old friends. It was hard to believe it possible! When the ladies rose, Judith knew that he must see her. She kept her eyes steadily on Mrs. Danvers' back, and soon found herself safely in the drawing-room.

"Lydia," she said, "why did you not tell me that Geoffrey Fielding would be here?"

"I forgot his name. He was at school with Tom. I never saw him till yesterday. But oh, Mr. Russell is such a dear! And to hear him talk about those awful slums, and all the organisations he has set on foot, is delightful. You must listen to him, Judith. He is an enthusiast, and quite carries one away. And I told Tom not to stay long in the dining-room. Oh, here they are!"

It was only Geoffrey who had followed the ladies so quickly. He came up to Judith in eager excitement; and as he clasped her hand, and began to express his delight at their meeting, it seemed to Judith as if the five years rolled away, and they were friends and comrades as of old.

"To think that you were so near me all through dinner, and I did not know. Wonderful! Had you recognised me?" he said.

"I did not see you, but I knew your laugh."

"Yes, I can laugh still.... And you are not changed—only—well, yes, you are changed. But you are just the same, the very same old Judith! And you are not married?"

"Oh dear no! And you?"

"No. It is good to meet you again, Judith. I never dreamt of such luck! I never thought of you being in London — did not even know you had anything to do with old Tom Mordaunt. I had not seen him for about fifteen years till the other day."

"But," Judith said, her frank eyes smiling in response to his, "if you are glad to see me again, why have you never been to Ernthwaite? Why have you never written—never taken any notice of any of your old friends? We did not know that you were eyen alive. Why"—

"It is a long story," he interrupted, a cloud crossing his bright face. "A long story, and a miserable one."

"Oh, you have been in trouble? Yes, I can see that you have. You are changed. But you should have come to Ernthwaite, to your old friends."

There was something very winning in the warm sympathy of voice and look, and the young man longed to tell his tale there and then.

"I have been to Ernthwaite since I came back to England—once. I hoped to find my father there—I had not heard of his death,—but I was too late."

"You have been to Ernthwaite," she repeated, "and not to see us!"

"Forgive me, Judith! You will forgive me when you know why I could not come. I was half beside myself at the time. But don't let us talk about me, this evening—it spoils the pleasure of seeing you. Tell me about everything and everyone. How is Mrs. Sylvestre? Is she as beautiful as ever?"

"Quite."

"I heard of dear Dr. Tyson's death. How terrible that was! And Gladys is married to Smallman after all! Judith, it is like a breath of mountain air to meet you! It is almost too wonderful to realise! What do you say to a ramble to-morrow morning across the fells to Greybridge? Or shall we have a climb up to the top of Ernthwaite Pike? Are you as fond of the old places as ever?"

Judith smiled at the doubt implied. "Of course! I love the people and places always, whom I love once."

"Of course you do!" Geoffrey said, laughing. "It was a stupid question to ask. I ought to have known you better. And you and Mrs. Sylvestre live on, just the same, in the beautiful old Hall, and have been there, doing the same kind of things, these five years! It is like thinking of a perpetual spring, which never fails winter or summer, but waters all the land round, and makes it fruitful and flowery."

"You turned poetical! I should hardly have believed that, even in five years!" she laughed.

"Oh, you may laugh—but it is enough to make any clown poetical to think of your beautiful life there, while the world was wagging on so roughly with some of us. What a fine fellow your new vicar is!"

"Do you know him too? I can't understand it. Why did he never speak of you to us? He knew we were anxious about you."

"Were you? That was very sweet of you, Judith. Somehow, I fancied myself forgotten, and I did not want him to speak of me. I was best forgotten." Again the cloud gathered in the sunny blue eyes. Judith turned away her face, and opened her fan, to hide the pain that his words gave her. She seemed to realise at that moment all she had suffered on his account.

"Don't be vexed with me," he said pleadingly; "put your fan down, and look at me. Yes, that is better. There never were such honest eyes as yours, Judith. . . . I seem to have been living in another world to yours, and I never dreamt of your being anxious about my fate. And afterwards, since I flung myself, in desperation, into work here with this splendid man, Russell, it has become all-absorbing. In fact, I have tried to kill a hated remembrance."

"But not all remembrance, surely," she said, with soft reproach. "Whatever you might wish to forget,

old friends have some claim to share your joys or sorrows. Friends can help one another."

At that moment the other men entered the room, and Tom Mordaunt, his good-natured countenance wearing an expression of but half-hidden weariness, came to them.

"I suppose you are happy, even in London, Judith, since you have discovered a bit of native Ernthwaite? You north country folk are absurdly clannish. But you seem to forget that there are other people in this room, and Lydia wants you to hear her new lion roar."

"Oh yes!" Judith said, rising. "I must listen to what Mr. Russell is telling them. Doesn't he interest you, Tom?"

"Not particularly. Between ourselves, this is a slower affair even than the Esoteric Buddhists. There was some fun to be got out of the astral planes and karmas. But these East-Enders are so desperately in earnest, that one has to take them seriously. Lydia has been dying to be initiated into their works since—exactly the day before yesterday, wasn't it?"

While the rest of the company gathered about Mr. Russell and Canon Benett, the host slipped away, and had a soothing nap in the library.

Judith found the discussion interesting, and was delighted with the East-Enders. But a little thing

that happened at the last moment delighted her even more than Mr. Russell's heart-stirring eloquence.

When she left the drawing-room, Geoffrey was engaged in a deep discussion, and as he did not appear to notice her departure, she had not chosen to interrupt his conversation to bid him good-bye. But before she was half-way downstairs there was a step behind her, and Geoffrey said, "Did you mean to run away without telling me where I can find you again, Judith? I daresay I deserve to be so treated—but"—

She turned a forgiving face to him, and gave the address of the house where she and Mrs. Sylvestre were staying. Geoffrey took her cloak from the servant, and, as he put it on for her, said, "Do you remember the last time we bade one another goodnight, at the edge of the Ernthwaite woods, when you would not let me go home with you? What a young cub you must have thought me!"

Judith laughed, and blushed. "I am glad you repent even after five years!" she said.

He held her hand, and looked into her eyes, as he had done that evening. But there was a shadow behind the old merry smile, and he gave a half-repressed sigh, as he said, "Repentance! It has been my meat and drink for many a dark day. May I come and tell you my story some day, Judith?"

"Yes, yes! But it cannot be so bad! You could

not do anything wrong—not really wrong! You are making too much of it."

He pressed her hand as she got into the carriage, and lingered at the door, the light of the lamp full on his fair hair and white brow.

"You can't think how thankful I am to have met you," he said. "It's the first time I have been out to dinner for an age, and it seems to me a good omen, as if I might make a fresh start from to-night. May I come and see you to-morrow? . . . Good-bye, then, until to-morrow! Give me one of your flowers in remembrance of our meeting!"

Mrs Sylvestre looked up from her book when Judith entered the room.

"Well? Has it been very dismal?... My dear child! What has happened?"

Judith slipped off her fur-lined cloak, and stood looking into the fire, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes; and played with the remnants of the bunch of yellow chrysanthemums which had adorned the bosom of her dress,

"Nothing has happened, exactly. Only—Geoffrey Fielding was there, and he is living in London, and is coming to see us to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XXIII

It was a long walk to Geoffrey's quarters over a grocer's shop in a street off Whitechapel Road; but he declined the offer of a seat in Mr. Russell's hansom. He wanted to think. This sudden meeting with Judith seemed to bring him up, and force him to stand face to face with himself. He had for the past twelve months been connected with the society to which Mr. Dale had introduced him, and had flung himself into the work with the zeal of desperation. Emigration was his hobby; and to organise and supervise suitable companies of colonists, and to settle them upon suitable land in the Colonies, had been his special mission. He devoted time and money to this end, and found it grow more and more absorbing, and full of increasing interest. In this way he was brought into contact with a new phase of life, and driven to forget, in the larger sorrows of humanity, the sordid tragedy of his own failure.

Everywhere the same elements of joy and pain,

sin and virtue, are found. But it is only by intercourse with the very poor that one comes to see the facts of life naked. The poor have no time to disguise ugly truths for decency's sake. Even the thin veil of conventional reticence is discarded. Gaunt and bare, poverty shows itself without pretence. Crime stalks, shameless in its hideousness. Disease flaunts in open daylight. No fastidiousness can blink the ghastliest sights.

Into this seething mass of misery Geoffrey plunged —full, at first, only of his own trouble. But soon the enthusiasm of humanity laid hold upon his young and still unspoiled nature; and the passion of desire to help others whose necessity was greater than his own, drove out the sense of personal misery. Gradually his sanguine temperament reasserted itself. In forgetting self Hope for others wakened hope for he saved self. himself also; and as months passed, he was able to forget the past, and to form plans for the future. had already been to Manitoba and secured land for his first batch of colonists; and this winter he was engaged in giving lectures on agriculture and stockraising. His design was that the men who joined his party should become owners of the land as they were able to pay the price of it; and he had brilliant visions of the formation of a prosperous colony from this small beginning.

Ernthwaite and his old friends seemed to have

faded out of his existence—until this evening, when the meeting with Judith startled him into vivid remembrance of what had been. It was a keen delight to see her, but not all delight. What would he not give to cancel the events which seemed to draw an invisible barrier between him and his old girl-friend!

"But how true she is!" he thought. "How sweet and full of sympathy! Anyone could read purity and truth in her face. . . . From Judith to-my God! what a chasm between them! . . . That is past, thank God! It haunts me less and less—but still, it is there. When Judith knows, will it make her hate me? Will she throw me off with scorn—or will she be able to understand, and forgive even that? . . . A year ago I should have said that she could never let me be her friend, if she knew. Now, I think she may forgive the sin, in pity for the sinner. I know that is how good people think of sin-how God thinks of it. know that the more I hate the thought of what I did, the more able I am to build up a new life on the wreck Am I forgetting my shame, stifling my of the old. remorse too easily? I tell myself that I have been a thief—that I defrauded the helpless; and yet I know that I have lived it down—I can meet men and women and look them in the face unashamed. It is strange!

"Dear Judith! there is no one like her. How bonnie she is! We were as brother and sister before I left Ernthwaite. I wonder if we may be again. It would be splendid to have such a friend—and to have her confidence and sympathy. She seemed glad to see me; she had been anxious about me.... I wonder how I could go away as I did, and think so little of her friendship—though I always cared more for her than for anyone. How pretty— Hallo! a light in my room! What does that mean?"

He let himself in, and hurried up-stairs. His sitting-room was plainly but comfortably furnished, and not ascetic in character. There was a pervading suggestion of tobacco. There were one or two easy chairs, and books and papers scattered about. The fire was burning and the lamp lighted, and Geoffrey found a visitor waiting for him. A boy had seated himself behind the door and fallen asleep. His head hung back uncomfortably, and he started at the sound of Geoffrey's entrance, and staggered to his feet, colouring, and instantly wide awake.

"I ax yer pardon, sir"—he began shyly; but Geoffrey threw his arm round the lad's shoulders and drew him towards the fire. "All right, Peter! You were very sensible to take forty winks while you were waiting for me. But you might have chosen a more comfortable seat. Take that big chair, and wait another minute."

Geoffrey hurriedly changed his dress coat for an old one, so as to look less of a "swell" in his visitor's eyes; and then said, "Now if you'll help me to get

out the cups and saucers, I'll make some hot coffee in two minutes. I've had a long tramp, and I am ready for a feed."

Peter was willing enough to fill the kettle, and hand out the cups and saucers and bread and butter; but when Geoffrey bade him draw a chair to the table, he hung back.

"Nonsense! I can't eat and drink alone, and let my visitor watch me, can I? If you won't join me, for company's sake, I must wait," Geoffrey said; and at last Peter took the place prepared for him. As the stimulating coffee and the welcome food refreshed him, the boy's weary eyes brightened, his pallid lips and cheeks showed some colour, and his shyness began to wear off.

He was a lad in whom Geoffrey was much interested. His story was a sad one, and appealed specially to Geoffrey's sympathy. Without father or mother, so far as anyone knew, he had been brought up a workhouse foundling; but his delicate features and refined air would have been noted as infallible signs of high breeding in the son of a duke. From the workhouse he went to a shop, placed there as a small white slave by the guardians. There was no vice in the child; but bullied by another shop-boy, he stole a few shillings from the till, and was forthwith placed in a reformatory for five years. good conduct during that time won for him the

attention of the authorities, and on being discharged, Peter, who was absolutely friendless, was apprenticed to a joiner, and at the same time recommended to the care of the society over which Mr. Russell presided. This had been his salvation; but the timid lad was not of stuff to be knocked about in a rough and ready world; and he suffered much mentally from the jeers of his companions, and physically from the extreme poverty in which he struggled to exist. His employer had undertaken to keep him for three years and teach him a trade, in return for his work and for the sum of money paid by the reformatory authorities. But the "keep" was of the most meagre kind; and the growing youth was always tired, always hungry-and almost always unhappy.

The nickname of "St. Peter" was about the most offensive which the rough wit of the boys who lived round him could devise; and to bully "St. Peter," and tell grotesque stories about him, became an excellent source of amusement—not out of cruelty so much as thoughtlessness, and because the poor boy's harmlessness and timidity made him a natural butt for the latent love of tormenting which exists in most men. When the emigration scheme had been mooted at the night-school which Peter attended, he had jumped at the idea as a possibility of escape from the life which was crushing him. His three years' bondage

would be at an end in January. His knowledge of his trade would be useful; and Geoffrey made the terms of the passage so easy, that Peter thought, by working overtime, he could get the necessary money.

Geoffrey hoped that for Peter, as much as for anyone, the new start in a new world would be a good thing, and he was disappointed when the lad said, in answer to his inquiry as to the reason of his visit—

"It's to say, sir, as 'ow I must give up the emigration, and I didn't want you to think it was just that I'd changed my mind. It isn't that, sir!"

"I'm very sorry to hear this, Peter, whatever your reason is—very sorry," Geoffrey said. "Are you afraid you cannot raise the money?—because we might manage that."

"No, sir. It's the other chaps who are going. They say"—the boy's face flushed painfully and his lips quivered,—"they say that if a fellow wot's spent five years in quod—that's the reformatory, sir—can be such a swell as to go colonisin' when he's only seventeen, why, they'd better all turn pickpockets at once, and see if they'll get on as well. They usen't to throw it at me, at first, about having been in there, sir; but now some of the men in your class say, that if the likes of me is to go out and set up respectable in the new colony, it's time for them to back out, that's all. They say that they're not pious enough

for the likes of 'St. Peter,' meaning me, sir; and so I've come to tell you that I'll not go. I'd only do 'arm to the whole business, if the other chaps feels like this, you see, sir. So I'd like you to take my name off the books, please, sir, and when I don't come to the class to-morrow, you'll know it isn't just as 'ow I've changed my mind."

"But I want you to go with us, Peter. They'll leave off this cruel talk by and by, if they find you don't care. I can't let you be bullied into giving it up."

The lad shook his head sadly. "It ain't no use goin' to a new country to make a new beginning, if the disgrace is goin' with me," he said. "If the others tell everyone wot they say here—that St. Peter for all his cantin' was in a reformatory five years for prigging—why, then, it ain't any good for me to go. And I don't know how to live it down, sir. It seems no use to try. It's there—you see! It's all true, and I can't undo it now; never, as long as I live"—and he stopped, with a sob in his voice.

"No, dear lad, we can't undo the past, none of us. Would to God we could!" Geoffrey said. "Yet it is really better for us that we cannot. Don't you see what an awful thought it is, and how careful it must make us when we realise it, that a thing once done never can be undone? Besides, if we have done wrong, I suppose we are never meant to forget it ourselves. That is the worst part of our punishment,

and we must just take it and bear it. But as for you, Peter, you've earned the right to lead an honourable, happy life, and, with God's help, you shall, in that new country!"

Peter wiped his eyes on his jacket sleeve and looked at Geoffrey with wistful eyes.

"Do you think I ought to go, sir? If it would do the whole thing 'arm"—

"You shall go with me, whoever else goes or stays," Geoffrey said. "You and I—but I much more than you—have to make amends for what cannot be undone in the past. If I am for the work in hand, there can be—there shall be no question of you being fit to go with me!"

"If you are fit, sir?" the boy exclaimed, income lous. Geoffrey nodded. "Perhaps I ought to have told my story before," he said, "but there did not seem any necessity, and I am ashamed of it. But now I see plainly it has to be done. When we meet at class to-morrow, I'll make a clean breast of it. haps those who scoff at you, Peter, will say that I'm not fit company for them. Dear lad! I tell you, what I did was ten thousand times worse than your I was not put in prison, but I've had part of my punishment—and it is not over yet. Once I felt that I wasn't fit to live among honest men. learned that the only way to repent is to live an honest life, and walk straight on, doing the best one can,

not perpetually whining over the bad thing done long ago. And I think those fellows who torment you will understand when I tell them about myself. At all events, we will face them, side by side, and have it out."

The clock struck twelve, and Peter rose to go. "I don't think I shall care so much what they say, now, sir. You seem to have made it all look different," he said, with a smile and look of loving confidence which went to Geoffrey's heart.

For the lad's sake, he was resolved to tell his own story. But it was not easy to him to make or to keep such a resolution. Mr. Russell, the head of the Settlement, knew it, but no one else; and Geoffrey shrank from the thought that men whom he liked, and who had treated him as a friend, might despise him when they knew the truth. He still loved to be esteemed, and it was torture to him to drag out of the safe darkness of the past the facts which were ugly and hateful. But he knew that it must be done.

Judith, too, must know the whole truth—but not just yet.

The next day he went to see her. Mrs. Sylvestre was out when he arrived, and Judith and he had a long, serious talk.

"Yes, I mean to tell you all my life story," he said, in answer to some question of hers. "It is not a good record. But if we are to be friends, real friends,

there shall be no secrets. Perhaps you will be sorry then that we met last night."

Judith could not hide her feelings if she tried, and in this particular instance saw no necessity for trying.

"You cannot know what real 'friendship' means," she said, with the frank smile that spoke of warm sympathy. "Real friends do not mind if people have faults. They like the faults. Besides, faultless people make one uncomfortable. Our good vicar, for instance, is just a trifle too good."

Geoffrey smiled rather sadly. "I shall not offend you in that way. But I've got a tough piece of work to pull through this evening, and I don't want to talk about myself now. . . . It is good to be with you again. All these years seem to vanish, and it is as if we were boy and girl together, firm friends as ever."

"So we may be," Judith said.

"Even when you know that I have acted badly, and brought shame into my life? I wonder if you will be able to forgive! Sometimes you used to scold me. Sometimes you were very hard upon wrongdoers, Judith."

"Yes, I know I am hard sometimes; but I don't think you can have done anything really bad. Don't tell me—I would rather not know. We will go on now just as we were five years ago."

"Just as we were?" he echoed. "I hope not. I

was a young cub and a fool. Do you remember our last walk together, and the advice you gave me, and how I scoffed at it? You were right in every word, and I was wrong. I would give worlds at this moment to have listened to you, and never to have left Ernthwaite."

When Mrs. Sylvestre came in, she found the two deep in reminiscences of Ernthwaite days. She was sorry that Geoffrey had reappeared; but she could not be insensible to his old charm of manner—to the boyish gaiety, and the open delight he showed in this renewal of the friendship of the past.

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," he said more than once—"that dinner last night. Imagine if you and Judith had gone away, and I had never seen you!"

"Still, you have contrived to exist without seeing us for a good many years. And Ernthwaite is not an impossible distance from London."

The sudden cloud of trouble fell upon his face.

"I could not come to Ernthwaite. The past has seemed dead for a long while, but the sight of Judith brought it all to life. I don't know now how I could have existed without seeing you."

He spoke to Mrs. Sylvestre, but looked at Judith.

"Geoffrey always was a nice boy," Mrs. Sylvestre said, after he had gone, "and he has not lost that

winning way of his. He is very pleasant; I can't deny it."

"Why do you want to deny it?" Judith said.

"Only from perversity, my dear, because you never would see a fault in him, and of course he has plenty of faults. He behaved very badly to his father, and to all of us. And now he laughs, and is delighted to see us—and thinks we must be equally charmed with him. Why has he been all this time in London, and never been near us? There is a mystery, and mysteries always mean naughtiness."

"Whatever he may have done, he has suffered for it," Judith said. "Sometimes he seems so changed as to be another person. Do you not see the difference in him?"

"My dear, I am not blind. Yes, something has happened to him, and left its mark upon him. That is the mystery I speak of."

## CHAPTER XXIV

HARD as it was, Geoffrey kept his resolution, and found that nothing could more completely have won the confidence of the men he wanted to influence, than the confession he made. When he told how, after tracing the child he had robbed, and full of eagerness to make reparation to her—he had been too late, and arrived at his old home to find her buried beside the old father whom he had neglected, more than one voice muttered, "Poor chap! it was pretty rough—that was!" When he appealed to all who knew how easy it was to fall, and how hard to bear the burden of remorse, to help one another to live down the past, there was a shy growl of "Ay, ay! You're right!" from many of his listeners.

After that evening, Geoffrey was on new terms with his pupils. They were friends. They trusted him with their own difficulties; all suspicion of patronage seemed to have vanished, and the consciousness of the gulf between gentlemen and labourers

to have disappeared. Peter had no more taunts to endure. His tormentors were silenced by the well-disposed; and Peter could endure anything now that he had someone to love. It was more than love—the poor lad's new feeling for Geoffrey. It was devotion. Geoffrey never forgot to give him a special greeting at the evening class; and in the strength of that Peter lived until the next.

Geoffrey's days were well filled this winter; but he made time to see Judith frequently. There was no difficulty in falling into the old familiarity of inter-Judith threw herself with interest into his course. interests. He entertained his men and boys one evening a week at a sociable club, and Judith thought it a little thing to go there and sing and play for them. It seemed a great thing to Geoffrey, and gave great pleasure. A pretty young lady brightens a place by her mere presence; and Judith was so simple and friendly that she found it easy to be at home with these people. She soon knew them individually, and entered into their histories and cares. When not playing or singing, she went from one to another as naturally as if it had been her own drawing-room stopped to ask one about his sick wife; chatted with another over the news of the day, or the book he was She would teach a young new-comer to play draughts, and win him out of his shyness; or make a cup of coffee for a late visitor. It seemed to

Geoffrey that the rough men grew week by week softened in manner, and more careful in speech, touched by the influence of this gracious woman presence.

She began, too, to learn something of city poverty in her visits to the men's houses—a saddening knowledge, but well to be attained.

So the weeks slipped on, and Geoffrey had not yet told her the story of those five years. Judith hoped he would never tell her. She was satisfied. She saw that he was moved now by nobler motives than of old, and was stronger of purpose than she had dreamt he would become. Some discipline of sorrow had changed her light-hearted boy-friend into an earnest man, fitted for patient effort and heroic self-denial. Surely, whatever had happened, it was well.

Life in London lost all dreariness to the countryloving girl. There was no more complaining about the dull streets—no more sighing for the woods and fells.

Tom Mordaunt was delighted, and Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith hopeful—until she heard of Geoffrey Fielding's constant visits, and of Judith's interest in his East End work.

"We shall convert you into a Londoner yet!" her step-brother said, with his good-tempered laugh. "There never was a country mouse that did not get to love this much-abused old London of ours in time! There's no other place in the world to live in, that's certain. Your pretty lakes and mountains are all very well to go and look at, for a week or two; but when you come to live in London you soon find out the difference. Confess—you're not pining to go back now, are you?"

"No," Judith said, with reluctant admission. "But you must not think it is because I love Ernthwaite less, or London more. It is only"—

"Oh, that's enough!" he laughed again. "We don't know why it is, nor how it is, but London draws us all. There's a fascination about it—call it smoky and foggy, and ugly and overgrown, and what you will. I always say—Once live in London, and you will find it impossible to live anywhere else; and even you are finding my words come true!"

"I really begin to think that Judith is coming to be more like other people," said Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith to Mrs. Sylvestre. "She has given up raving about Ernthwaite, and looks quite bright and contented here. I am sure town life agrees with her; she is beginning to like the gaieties and amusements. And it is only natural; and I really hope she will come up to me next season, and be presented—instead of burying herself in the country. I really begin to hope she may do well after all!"

But Mrs. Sylvestre knew why Judith's eyes were so bright and her voice so blithe; and it troubled her. One day she began to remonstrate about Judith's devotion to the East End.

"You have been so accustomed to be independent, my dear Judith, that you really ignore the proprieties. Why don't you get Lydia to go with you to those meetings? It is very odd for a young lady to be driving off to Whitechapel alone, evening after evening. And though the East End may be another world, as you say, I don't see why no chaperon is needed even there."

"Oh, Lydia?" Judith said, laughing. "She is tired of social questions and the East End now, and is devoted to Egyptology. She spends hours at the British Museum among the mummies and inscriptions, and says she has learnt such a lot of delightfully interesting ancient customs; and could talk of nothing but tombs and Osiris, the last time I saw her."

"Ridiculous little person!" exclaimed Mrs. Sylvestre.
"Can't you get anyone else to go with you? Perhaps I ought to go?"

"Oh no! you would not like it. Geoffrey is always with me, so it is quite right. Everyone there is polite to a lady, and you know there is no fear of gossip. But will you come, just for once, and see?"

"No. I have no sympathy with this meddling music-playing philanthropy. Geoffrey's proper place is among his equals. He could live a useful and honourable life, and do good to his fellow-creatures,

without trying to turn the arrangements made for him by society all topsy-turvy. This new craze of educated men, to fling themselves away in wild attempts to elevate people who don't want to be elevated, seems to me as absurd as the Crusades, and it will have about as much result. If each one who seriously wants to improve the world would stay at home; live rightly at home; prevent wrong-doing at home; help those who need help at home,—the world would be mended much sooner than by all the waste and splendid folly of crusades, ancient or modern. course you don't believe me, and I never argue. Go away, and sing your ballads and play your Beethoven. But I think it is quite time for us to get back to Ernthwaite, and to look after our own poor folk!"

Mrs. Sylvestre determined that home they would go. She did not suppose that running away from the man she had loved so long would make any change in Judith. But it was distinctly irritating to sit still and see the girl placidly drift into such a marriage.

With Geoffrey himself Mrs. Sylvestre had no special fault to find; but as a husband for Judith he was full of faults. To begin with, he would take her away from Ernthwaite. Then he appeared to have no settled home or plan of life, and was giving himself up to visionary philanthropic schemes very distasteful to Mrs. Sylvestre. It was characteristic of the woman that, seeing plainly what was coming,

she never dreamt of refusing her consent, or of using any kind of coercion to persuade Judith to do otherwise. It was provoking; but then most things that happened were provoking—if one allowed oneself to be provoked.

Judith's other friends gradually had their eyes opened also.

Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith was distressed. "How can you let her dream of such folly?" she said to Mrs. Sylvestre. "It will be a wretched match for Judith."

"They will not be dreadfully poor," said Mrs. Sylvestre placidly, perversely enjoying the situation. "Geoffrey will keep something to live upon, I should think; and Judith has enough for dress and pocketmoney."

"I am so disappointed!" moaned Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith. "I wish it could be put a stop to! To throw herself away upon a philanthropist—of all people! And the last time she dined with us, Sir Wilfred Broadlands was very much struck with her, and asked me about her, and I meant to invite him again as soon as possible. I am sure, with a little management, she might do well. It is too provoking! I can't imagine what you are thinking of to allow it to go on."

"Only of Judith's happiness," said Mrs. Sylvestre. Mrs. Grosvenor-Smith gathered her velvets and furs about her, and swept away to her carriage in a wrathful and perplexed state of mind. Lydia told her husband that she was sure it would end in an engagement. He only laughed, and said it was likely enough, as Fielding had once belonged to Ernthwaite. But London would be his home, so Judith might do worse.

"Oh ves! I think she will be very sensible indeed to get married," said Lydia. "It is something so new; and it will be much better for her to leave that village, where she must do the same thing every day of her life. Besides, a married woman has so many more enjoyments, and more scope. I wonder she has waited so long. And Geoffrey Fielding is a dear fellow! I don't remember if he is fair or dark. but I know he is good-looking. And was it the cause of the Jews he had taken up? Oh no, I remember. It was mesmerism he was so eloquent about, wasn't it? or the Labour Question? Anyhow, I shall like to have Judith in town. I shall make her go into the Rational Dress movement with me."

Geoffrey was indeed more lover than friend by this time. Every time he came to the house (and he came very often), Mrs. Sylvestre saw that his eyes followed Judith with more than friendly interest. His voice unconsciously softened when he spoke to her; he wanted Judith's opinion, Judith's advice, upon every matter.

One evening, when he was to take them to a concert, as they waited after dinner for the carriage,

Judith pronounced her verdict upon some social question, and Geoffrey said—

"Of course you are right. I never knew before how much better a woman's opinion is than a man's upon all these matters."

"It depends upon the woman," said Mrs. Sylvestre.

"I mean a good woman, of course—a sensible woman, a woman like Judith. She is worth a kingdom to a man, and worth a score of men friends, however good and wise they may be. You see, a woman's instinct is not blunt and slow like ours. She sees a thing at once. You cannot understand what a comfortable thing it is to bring one's perplexities to a woman whom one can trust to smooth them all out. It is as good as resting your head on a cool pillow when it aches. I pity a fellow who has no mother, or sister—or Judith!"

He was handing her a cup of coffee, and said the last word softly as he bent to her.

Mrs. Sylvestre, who stood near stirring her coffee, saw the girl's eyelids fall, and the quick blush sweep over her face.

"I suppose," she said coldly, "that it never occurs to men to ask themselves whether women like to be made pillows of? nor whether they ever need pillows for their own poor heads? You consider it their natural function to make things pleasanter for you. Well—if you have been looking upon Judith as your

pillow when you bring her all these miserable stories about your people, you will find it hard to do without her, perhaps. We are going home next week."

"Next week?" Geoffrey echoed blankly. "I thought you meant to stay over Christmas."

"So we did. But our quick instinct sometimes prompts us to change our minds. We like Christmas best at Ernthwaite, and it is unkind to Mr. Dale to stay away. You know Judith is a kind of lay curate—quite as useful as to be a pillow!"

"Yes, Mr. Dale will be thankful to have you back," Geoffrey said, pulling his moustache with melancholy abstraction; "but I"—

Judith glanced up, laughing. "Don't look so tragic, Geoffrey!" she said. "It is overdone. You existed a good many years without us, and made no desperate effort to renew our acquaintance."

"Perhaps it would have been better for me if I never had. It is all the worse now," he said gloomily. "However, of course, I have no right to growl. I have had six weeks of you." His sunny smile broke out as he went on: "What a blessed chance it was for me that I went to Tom Mordaunt's that evening! I can't imagine now that you and I should both be in London, and not meet—but it might have been so! It never can be again, though. I shall not lose sight of you again."

Geoffrey feared to spoil this happy friendship by

betraying his deeper feelings. He knew that he loved Judith with all the strength of his nature; and now that she was going away, it was doubly difficult to keep his words and looks, as he thought, moderated to conventional friendliness. How badly he had succeeded in doing so hitherto has been already told; and at last circumstances became too strong for him.

Judith had been specially interested in Geoffrey's young worshipper — Peter. She had seen delicate and unfit for hardship he was, and felt sure that if he continued the struggle with toil and poverty through the coming winter, he would not be able to face such an enterprise as emigration when Geoffrey saw that she was right, but April came. was puzzled what to do for the boy. Then Judith with Mrs. Sylvestre's consent—proposed that Peter should go down with them to Ernthwaite. work could be found for him out of doors, and Judith knew that she could arrange for him to board with the gardener or coachman. They were agreed that fresh air and good food would do more to fit him for colonising even than Geoffrey's classes. though at first reluctant to leave Mr. Fielding, had wonderful dreams of that unknown paradise called "The Country"; he had also perfect trust in Mr. Fielding's friend, and was ready to obey Fielding's words and wishes. When Mrs. Sylvestre saw him, she was delighted, and said it would be

quite a distinction to have so "Burne-Jonesey" a boy to hold her ponies, and that he must have a livery made at once.

A few days before they were to leave, Judith met Geoffrey and Peter at a tailor's to explain Mrs Sylvestre's wishes. The business transacted, and Peter dismissed, Geoffrey asked Judith to look in at the Winter Exhibition at Burlington House. She consented. One picture—the portrait of a well-known beauty, by a famous artist—attracted her strongly, and she returned to it more than once. The touch of the master-hand had enhanced the bewitching smile of the full red lips, the charm of the hazel eyes, the glint of the glorious hair.

"How I should like to see the living woman!"

Judith said. "She must be still more beautiful when
she speaks. I long to see her turn that pretty neck,
and open her lovely lips."

"She would say something intensely disagreeable if she did—false and vain, like herself, probably. Now, if you want one of them to talk," Geoffrey said, "come and question this old dame, with the strong wrinkled face and the twinkle in her eyes. She has had a history. She would say something worth listening to—while that painted doll"—

Judith laughed at his vehemence. "Don't you really admire her, Geoffrey? You must think her beautiful—even if you don't want to hear her talk."

"No, she isn't a bit beautiful to me. I hate hair of that colour. There is far more pleasure in looking at a good plain face with soul in it than at these simpering beauties. Come away, Judith!"

"Why do you hate hair of that colour?" she persisted. "It is the colour all artists rave about."

"Let them rave! Women with hair and eyes of that colour are false. Good women have brown hair and grey eyes."

"Nonsense! Besides, I never said she was good. It is enough to be so wonderfully beautiful; but there is no reason why she should not be good too. Did you ever see such beautiful hair before?" A sudden little prick of jealousy made Judith continue the subject.

"Yes. Come away! I hate to look at this woman, because she reminds me of another."

A chill fell upon the girl, and she could not go on talking of common things.

"I should like you to tell me about the other woman with the beautiful hair," she said presently.

"Yes, I want to tell you," he answered. "I have wanted to tell you all the time, but you would not listen to me. Let us go to the Park. It will be quiet there."

The Park was almost deserted this late winter afternoon. They walked under the bare trees by the grey water, and might have suddenly plunged into

rural solitude, it was so quiet and green-grey all around. There Geoffrey told his story—of his meeting with the lovely widow on board the *Sarmatian*, of the passion which took possession of him, and of their marriage at the Registrar's office in Liverpool.

"I am so tired!" Judith said, when he reached this point; for her limbs trembled. There was a seat close by, at the side of the broad walk facing the Serpentine, and they sat down.

The short December day was closing rapidly; and as the sun dropped in a dim red glow behind the dark trees, the smoke-clouds were glorified into a dull crimson haze. Before them, across a strip of grass, the grey water stretched into seemingly infinite space beyond the mists which rose and hid the farther margin. No one was near; and the stillness was only accentuated by the far ceaseless roar of the London streets. Judith looked across the misty water in silence for a few moments. Then she turned to Geoffrey.

"You told me when we first met that you were not married. You cannot have told me a lie! What does it mean? If you are married, I ought to have known—sooner."

## CHAPTER XXV

THERE was a tone in her voice that made Geoffrey suddenly bold. 'I told you the truth, Judith," he said. "I am not married, thank God! I believed that I was; but when she left me, she told me that her husband was living; and though she had dragged me down to shame and sin, I was free. Judith, are you turned from me by this hateful story? I am ashamed to speak to you of such things, yet I want you to know everything."

Judith looked across the water without answering, but her hand rested on the seat, and when he clasped it, she did not withdraw it.

"I thought," he went on, "that no woman would have power to move me again. I hated the word love. When she had gone, I found to my relief that her story about her husband was true. I went to Ernthwaite, hoping to find my father there, and for other reasons—that I am going to tell you of. Can you wonder that at such a time I had no desire to see

you, or anyone?... But I cannot go on, Judith—I cannot tell you the rest, until you say one word. I deserve all the blame you can give me; but I want your pity too, for I have suffered bitterly."

She looked at him through a mist of tears. "How can I blame you? You did no wrong; you were deceived and injured."

"There is worse to tell. She bewitched me, and I"-

"Oh, tell me nothing more!" she broke in. "I know you. It hurts me when you recall these things. Let them be forgotten. It was not you—the real you—who did anything shameful."

"Yes, that is true," he said. "And it is true that you know the real me. . . . I wish I could feel the same about you. I wish I could read your heart!"

"You may read it."

He bent towards her, and his voice trembled. "May I read there anything more than friendship for your old playmate? May I read one sign of the love that can pardon him, and crown his life with blessedness? Do you love me, Judith?"

"I have loved you all my life, and shall until the end," she said simply.

He drew her to him and kissed her lips. "Now I ought not to be afraid! I know that love can blot out all remembrance of sin. You must hear the rest of my miserable story, Judith. I

shall not be happy until you know and forgive everything."

"Ah! you do not quite trust me," she said, smiling. "I could not cease loving you. It is part of my life. When you seemed lost—all those years, I was not always unhappy, for I had so much to make my life pleasant. But there was always a blank, and nothing but you could fill it. Now, if you love me"—

"If, Judith!" There were a few moments of the not-to-be-recorded protestations which make the dullest man eloquent for once.

At last he said, "It is hard to go back to the task I have set myself, but it must be done. . . You scorn all things mean and dishonourable, Judith. Dearest! you must try to see that a man may be tempted and driven to do, or to allow to be done, what is dishonourable, in spite of himself."

Judith held his hand fast, and smiled confidently.

"You are trying to frighten me, but I am not frightened. You naturally exaggerate the thing, whatever it is. I shall see it in a truer light. You talk about doing wrong. We have all done wrong scores of times! But you could not do anything mean or base. I am so sure of it that I shall never think of it again, if you will let it pass. I would rather not know. But if you will be more content to tell me all about it, dear, tell me now, and then it will be over, and we will put it away for ever. You need

not be afraid, Geoffrey." She kissed him gravely, and then, looking straight into his eyes, said, "Now, confess! I know it hurts you,—and it may hurt me too a little, but it will soon be over."

"It was mean and base, Judith, though I meant to do no wrong, God knows! She—the woman I believed to be my wife—deceived and befooled me. Before I left America, a woman whose husband had been killed, and whom I had undertaken to bring to England, died, and left her little girl in my care to bring home to her relations— Judith! Judith! don't speak yet. Listen quietly to my story!"

She had snatched her hand from his, and her cheeks were aflame. "You cannot mean little Bessie?" she cried. "You are trying me too much, Geoffrey! Oh for pity's sake say that you don't mean Bessie?"

"Yes, it was Bessie Dalton who was left in my charge, and I meant"—

"It cannot be true," she cried, wringing her hands.

"It could not be you who robbed her of her money, and left her to a stranger. Oh, it was not you! You frighten me, Geoffrey! What makes you say such a horrible thing?"

"Because it is true. Dear, listen to me!"

But Judith got up—a passionate light in her eyes. "How can I listen to you if this is true? If you were that wretch—if you are capable of breaking faith with a dead woman, and robbing a helpless child—

you are not the Geoffrey Fielding I loved. Oh! it seems impossible."

He got up too, and tried to take her hand, but she drew back. "Judith, let me explain. I know it was horrible, and indeed you cannot hate the thought of it more than I do. I was bewitched—duped—and I meant all the time"—

"Oh, what does it matter about meaning, if you could do such a thing?... I would not have believed it of you, if all the world had sworn it. You, whom I thought the soul of truth! You, whom I have loved all my life! Geoffrey, say it is not true! It cannot be true!"

"It is true."

Judith trembled, and her face grew white.

"Then we part, and I hope never to see or hear of you again," she said. "The disgrace seems to spread to me too, for thinking that I loved you—a man who could do such a thing! Oh! hush! hush! There can be no excuse. You either did it, or did not do it."

"I did it."

"Then how dared you come and seek my love, and let me think that you were a man whom it was an honour to be loved by?" she cried passionately. "The thought of it chokes me. . . . I hardly know what I am saying. What is the use of saying anything? If this is true, there is no bond between us. I have been tricked into saying I loved you—if it is true!"

Her reiteration of the words "if it is true" was pathetic.

"Would to God it were not true!" Geoffrey said.

Once more she broke in, with a bitter laugh-

"And you thought I could overlook this, and love a man who had done this? It was an insult to me to think it possible. I said once that I hoped to see the villain who had deserted little Bessie punished—and now, if I am cruel, I am only just."

"No, Judith—you are not just either to yourself or to me," he said firmly. "It is right that I should be punished, but it is wrong for you to be cruel. Think over it! Let me write and tell you exactly how it happened. You cannot hate the thing more than I do. But our love was too real and beautiful to be lost because of this. God knows I have bitterly repented it. I would have given my life to undo it. There was no trick when I won you to confess your love for me. I believed that you could forgive and absolve, as human love can do, the worst sin. I forgot that pride is sometimes stronger than love."

"Yes," she said coldly; "I am too proud to love where I cannot honour. There is no need to think it over. I do not judge you. I am glad you have 'repented,' as you call it. I have no wish to balance your faults and virtues. I am only thankful that I know the truth in time, and am saved the humiliation

of becoming the wife of a man unworthy, in my opinion at least, of common respect."

She turned hastily away, for the heart-broken smile on Geoffrey's face at her last bitter words almost broke down her anger.

"May I not come home with you? It is late and dark," he said.

"No. I never want to see you again. It is all horrible and miserable—but at least I can keep my self-respect." She walked quickly homewards; and knew that he followed a few yards behind. Once or twice her steps slackened. If he should join her, and plead with her, could she resist him? Already pride and indignation were melting into love and pity. Already she knew that she had been bitterly cruel both to him and to herself.

But Geoffrey did not overtake her.

Of course Mrs. Sylvestre had to be told of the sudden rupture of Judith's friendship with Geoffrey; and for once she misjudged the girl, and believed that her anger had overcome the love of years. At first she offered some excuses for Geoffrey, and begged Judith to take time to think over the circumstances, and not to condemn him hastily.

"There is nothing to think over," Judith said.

"The more I think, the sharper the pain will be to find how I have been deceived. I loved an imaginary Geoffrey, that is all. Now I know the real one, and

I should hate and despise myself if I loved him. Never speak of him again."

"But, my dear, you are deciding the destiny of Geoffrey and yourself too hastily—and, let me say it, in a fit of temper. You will regret it."

"If I do, you shall never know," Judith said. "It is too late now, either to think over it or to regret it. I have said horrible things to him—things no man could pardon a woman for saying. And I meant them. Don't look distressed, Cousin Mary. I don't mean to make a moan about it. You know I never believed in dying of love, and that sort of thing. Life is beautiful, and when we once get back to Ernthwaite, the pain will go. I know it will... I only feel just now as if I had lost something—something I valued very much—that is all."

Mrs. Sylvestre's eyes became suddenly dim with tears. "Yes, that is all; but you will never feel, all your life through, as you did before you lost that something."

Judith threw her arms round her neck and kissed her. "Do not let us speak of it again," she said.

In a few days they went home. Judith had never seemed so enchanted with her own dear country, and often declared that she hoped never to go away again. Though the snow was on the hills and though the woods were bare, every curving line of white fells against the pale blue sky, every cluster of purple-brown woodland, came like music to her heart.

They had a warm welcome. The vicar was their first visitor. There was much for him to tell. The loss of Dr. Tyson was uppermost in all their thoughts, and Mr. Dale said that the blank in Ernthwaite was terrible. "Nineteenth Century Villa" was empty. The young man who had bought the practice lived in a larger village four miles away. Mrs. Tyson and Winifred lived at Dingle Hill, and they all attended Lockthwaite church.

"I see nothing of them. In present circumstances they could hardly be expected to be on visiting terms with me," he said, "for society has placed me under a ban. You do an outrageous thing to give me tea this afternoon, Mrs. Sylvestre. If any of the good people came in and found me here, they would shun me like a leper."

"What do you mean, Mr. Dale?" Mrs. Sylvestre said. "Surely this is nonsense!"

"It is nonsense, I think, but it is true. I am under a cloud of suspicion and dislike, and I can do nothing but wait until it passes."

"How odious of people!" Judith exclaimed. "I suppose the foot-path quarrel began it, and that was all my fault; and then I ran away and left you to bear the brunt. We must make up to you now.

Why did you not tell us, and we would have come home sooner?"

He laughed. "It was not very terrible. And you must not think I regret the fight. But the landlords can't forgive us for winning; and then I'm afraid I have made myself obnoxious by interfering about the river pollution at Greybridge, and the drainage at Stanmere."

"Ah yes! if you have been amusing yourself with that sort of diversion, no wonder you are out of favour," said Mrs. Sylvestre. "Human nature can bear much—but not interference with the sacred rights of landlords to do as they choose with their own streams."

"No. In their place I suppose I should feel as they do. But it is awkward for me. Not one of the 'quality' comes to Ernthwaite Church; and collections fall off. I am written against, and speechified against, as a heretic and socialist. They will soon make me famous."

"I am glad we are here now to stand by you. It vexes me when people don't fight fair, and if the law settled that you were in the right, why are you blamed? I suppose Mr. Smallman is still head and front of the enemy?" Judith said.

"I fancy Smallman is sorry it has gone so far. His wife does not like it, and she has a very good influence over him. He is a generous-hearted man, I am sure."

- "I never saw any signs of generosity."
- "But I have. After all, the whole thing is a trifle. I am not a society parson, and I have no one belonging to me to be hurt by social snubs. Now that you and Mrs. Sylvestre are home again"—but he did not finish the sentence.

"Yes, we must comfort you," Mrs. Sylvestre said.

"And remember, if your parish funds are low, that I consider my purse a cistern to supply the wants of Ernthwaite."

The vicar went away with a lighter heart than he had known for twelve months. Judith was near him again—to be seen, to be talked to daily. But she was changed—and he could not tell whether the change was favourable to his deeply cherished hopes or not.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE next afternoon Judith was in the churchyard, placing flowers on the graves of little Bessie and of Mr. Fielding and Dr. Tyson, when the vicar joined her. He looked harassed.

"Miss Mordaunt," he said, "I want to speak very seriously to you. It is my duty. You may think it interference—bút I must speak out."

"What do you mean? What have I done?" she said. "You look as if I had broken all the Ten Commandments."

"You have been very cruel to a good man. Geoffrey Fielding has told me, and"—

Judith turned white with anger. "I am surprised that Mr. Fielding should think it possible I would listen to anyone else on his behalf, when I refused to listen to him. I cannot talk about this, Mr. Dale. I will not hear a word."

"He has not asked me to plead with you on his behalf," the vicar said. "But I am sure you cannot

know the exact circumstances of his story, and I must tell you. He has redeemed himself nobly. He is far more worthy of you, I am sure of it, than when he went away from here—years ago."

Judith gathered the fragments of flowers into her basket, and stood up. "That may be. I cannot discuss it."

"Do let me tell you what he told me, when he came here to look for little Bessie—the very day after her funeral," Mr. Dale pleaded.

"I would rather not hear anything more about it.

If you had been open with us at that time, and told us all you knew, it would have spared much unnecessary pain. I cannot think why you hid his part in the miserable business from us."

"To save you—I knew you cared for him, and I thought the knowledge would be painful to you."

"Yes, I always cared. But the pain would have been less then than now. . . . I suppose you did it for the best—but truth is best."

"Hear the truth now," he said. "Don't spoil your life, and his—for pride. You have always loved him"—

"I loved a Geoffrey Fielding of my imagination; I never loved the man who robbed this child. You know what I thought of him. Never speak to me of this again. It is dead and buried."

Judith hastened away, and on her return to the

Hall found Winifred Tyson in full flow of talk. Mrs. Sylvestre made an excellent listener, and Winifred was in high spirits.

"I am telling Mrs. Sylvestre about my plans, I am going to Italy for four or five months Judith. with the Jenkinsons. We leave England immediately Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson are oldafter Christmas. fashioned, and would stay in Manchester for Christmas Dav. I told Katie it was a Philistine kind of thing to do-when we might have been in Rome! will be a little difficult to manage, with those provincial notions of theirs, I can quite foresee. However, they are really good, kind people, and one must make allowances. They are very rich - all Mr. Smallman's friends are — and Katie is the only child. She is very fond of me and looks up to me, and we have been a great deal together, reading Shelley and Browning, and going to the School of Art together. And I explain Browning to her, and direct her studies; and she is quite lost without me. So when this Italian tour was fixed, they invited me to go too." She paused to take breath.

"How delightful for you! How fortunate for you to have such nice friends!" Judith said.

"Yes. And how fortunate for them that I can go," Winnie went on, with utmost complacency; "for Katie cannot speak French or Italian with anything like my fluency; and besides, she would not know in the least what to look at, nor what to admire. It will really be an immense advantage to her to have someone with her who is well-read, especially in all art questions. Ordinary travellers miss the things most worth seeing, and make ridiculous mistakes in getting enthusiastic over second-rate art. Katie would go fatally wrong without me in the art galleries, to tell her what to admire. Of course Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson know nothing about it. He buys just what the picture dealers tell him to buy—as an investment; not because of its intrinsic value."

"And who will tell you what to tell Katie to admire?" asked Mrs. Sylvestre.

"Oh, I know. I have read so much—and then I have been so long at the Schools of Art, and I have passed in anatomy and perspective, and I have an innate artistic perception. I could not go far wrong. Besides, there is always Ruskin, you know. One cannot do without some guide in matters of that kind; and you must know your Ruskin well in Italy. Not that I accept his judgments as final; I shall verify or contradict them for myself. I have my own theory of art, and shall judge for myself. Only, in those great galleries it will be a help to know what to look at, and what not to go into raptures over, as the ordinary tourists do. For instance, I shall not let Katie rave about Milan Cathedral. I

shall point out its exaggerated and florid ornamentation; and make her contrast it with the Campo Santo at Pisa."

"But if she really likes Milan best"—

"She will not, if I show her how stupid it is to do so. And I shall not allow her to run after all the pretty Raphaels; and buy photographs of Corregios, and those over-estimated artists. I shall explain to her the hidden beauty and mystical meaning of the Carpaccios and Botticellis"—

"Yes," Mrs. Sylvestre interrupted, "and your studies in anatomy and perspective will help you greatly to appreciate Botticelli and Carpaccio."

Judith's smile was unobserved by Winifred, who continued gravely: "I do not see how they could get on without me. It would be mere waste of time, as far as Katie is concerned. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson are simply going to enjoy themselves; but I have tried to make Katie see that our aim ought not to be enjoyment, but self-improve-It is a serious privilege to travel in Italy, ment. and we ought to take it seriously. I am quite annoyed when people say, 'I hope you will enjoy your visit to Italy.' We might be going for a trip to the seaside! I tell Katie that our future Lifework ought to bear the impress of this journey for ever. It must be an Epoch in our lives. have no right to think of enjoyment when we are entering upon an Epoch. Did not you feel Italy so, Judith?"

"N—no. I'm afraid I only thought of enjoying everything day by day, and not of the impression Italy was making upon me. But then—I have no life work."

"No; you never took up a career. I remember you never could enter into my intense feeling of the importance of my own life. You and Gladys were always matter of fact; and of course everyone is not gifted with keen sensibilities and intense feelings. It is only the artist temperament that feels life in its fulness." She paused, and Judith seized the opportunity of saying—

"Do tell me something about Gladys. She never writes to me. She knew I did not like her marriage; but I hope she is really happy, and I want to see her again very much. How is she, Winnie?"

"I can't think why you objected to Mr. Smallman, nor why Gladys made such a fuss about marrying him," Winifred said. "She is very happy."

"I did not like him—no more did she at that time. But is she really happy now?"

"She ought to be, and—yes, I think she is. If not, I am sure it is her own fault. Mr. Smallman is very kind to her, and to us. Mother and I have lived with them ever since the marriage, and he does not seem to mind any expense; and he gives Gladys everything she wants. She has the loveliest dresses. Of course she must be happy."

"But you all persuaded her into it against her will—and there is something else one wants in a husband besides liberality," said Judith.

"I think that is the most absurd idea!" Winifred said emphatically. "No one made Gladys marry. could not do anything else, but that was her own And it was a very good thing for us that Mr. Smallman wanted to marry her. Mother has a comfortable home now, and there was no one else to help her. George says it takes everything he makes to keep up the style of living which a professional man is bound to keep up in London. Beatrice might have been interested in our case if we had been heathen Hindoos or Africans, but - well, you know So it really was Gladys's duty, I think. Beatrice! And Mr. Small-She was sure to marry someone. man was there, and no one else was. I cannot see, when a girl has to marry someone, that the particular man is of much consequence. I should not think of marrying. I have other and higher things before me, I hope. But if I were a mere ordinary pretty girl, and had made up my mind to it,—it might as well be Mr. Smallman as anyone else."

"Oh, Winnie! you know nothing about it!" Judith

exclaimed, laughing, but shocked at the dreadful heresy of the young cynic.

"Yes, I do. 'Lookers on see' --- you know the proverb. And I am quite convinced that one man will do as well as another, if he is decently Gladys had to get over a few good-tempered. prejudices and fancies perhaps, but so have other It's a kind of temporary delusion when people are in love; and when it has passed, there always comes disillusion. Gladys is better off, because she was not in love with Mr. Smallman; and I really think that she cares more about him now than she ever did—he makes such a fuss over her, and takes such care of her! Beatrice savs it is wicked, and that no one might ever have been—as Gladys is—before! But I think Gladys likes him to wait upon her, and she is pleased that he is pleased. At first, after her marriage, she was rather unhappy, I think, and odd and cross. But perhaps marriage makes girls odd and cross."

"I should think not!" Judith said, and at sight of the smile on her face, Winifred pursed her lips and rose to go.

"Oh, really, Judith, your views were never intense. This is just the commonplace kind of thing you are sure to do too, some day."

It may be interesting to record here that Winifred's

tour was highly successful, and that in her own opinion it constituted a marked "Epoch" in her development, and had a large influence upon her art education. I have not learned whether her friend and fellow-travellers derived all the benefit she intended from her advice; or whether they refused to forswear all the frivolous enjoyments of travel for the sake of "culture." Winifred conscientiously noted down original observations on famous pictures and buildings; and took the trouble to correct several errors in the criticism or interpretation of such pictures and buildings—into which previous travellers, including Mr. Ruskin, unaided by her keen young eyes and trenchant judgment, had fallen.

One result of her journey was a voluminous and fully illustrated journal; and on her return, her friends were required to read and study it, and thereupon to state whether the accomplished author and artist should decide to devote her talents henceforward to Art or to Literature. The suffrages for each were unfortunately equal; so that Winifred Tyson is still waiting for the overmastering impulse or incident which shall give the needful bias to her genius. Meanwhile she neglects no opportunity of cultivating her gifts, and, having no need to pray for the blessing of "a guid conceit of herself," she pursues her path with perfect self-assurance, now

inclining to think that Poetry of the intense school is the fit expression for her soul; now that she will presently produce a masterpiece—in the Impressionist manner. Time will show; and Winifred Tyson is still young.

## CHAPTER XXVII

One of the first calls Judith made was upon Miss Owthwaite; and when she found herself once more in the familiar kitchen, by the bright fireside, with the blue and white teacups on the table, and the kettle singing on the hob, she declared that she enjoyed this more than all the fine London entertainments to which she had been carried. Nothing had changed in Miss Owthwaite's kitchen since Judith could remember: and the little dressmaker herself looked exactly as she had always looked. She appeared to wear the same neat brown stuff gown and black apron; her brown, smooth hair showed no streaks of grey; the lines in her brow seemed no deeper now than they had been for years; her pale face, with its expression of long-endured pain, and patient smile, was never different, at least in Judith's "Indeed, Miss Owthwaite," she said, "I think you look younger, instead of a year older, since we went away. And I have been so pitying you, and

imagining that you would pine for me and Gladys. I don't believe you have missed us at all."

"Eh, my dear!" Miss Owthwaite protested, "the place hasn't been itself, and I've missed you sadly. Miss Gladys hardly ever comes near Ernthwaite now. I think it's hard for her to see the old house desolate, and she has only been once to see me since she was wed. But I've not been exactly lonely. You remember Martin—Mr. Crouch—and little Bessie, Miss Judith?"

"Of course; the queer, rough man who was so fond of the little lass, and then began to drink when she died, and gave you so much trouble."

"But that was only just an outbreak, Miss Judith, and I think we ought to forget it," Miss Owthwaite said, colouring. "He's never been a bit of trouble to me since, but a good, kind friend."

"I'm very glad," said Judith. She was rather bewildered, for Miss Owthwaite's blush deepened, and her hands trembled nervously as she began to pour out the tea. There was something more to be told about Martin, evidently.

"He's been here ever since," Miss Owthwaite went on; "and you would not call him queer if you knew him as I do now. Oh, Miss Judith! I've learned a deal from poor Martin. I've learned that it isn't fair for folk to judge one another too quickly, nor to be hard upon one another for a fault they don't happen to have any temptation to themselves. It's no merit in me to have been sober; and if I had turned away from Martin just for that outbreak, when his little lass died, there's no knowing how he might have gone on. God puts sweet fruit into bitter skins at times, and that man's heart is as tender as a child's. He's been cruelly treated by wicked people, God forgive them!"

Judith was bewildered at Miss Owthwaite's unusual excitement. She sipped her tea, and said after a pause—

"I am very glad he is kind to you!"

"He has not joined our chapel yet," Miss Owthwaite went on, "and I'm not sure that he ever will. But I'm sure that my prayers will be answered one day, and that he will find grace, and be convinced of sin. And it doesn't trouble me, as it used to do, if people can't put their religion into the same words as ours. Mr. Dale does not talk much about his poor sinful soul, and the precious blood of the Lamb, does he, Miss Judith? and yet no one can doubt that his religion is a real thing."

"No, indeed!"

"And Mr. Dale says I am right not to worry Martin about coming to chapel; and that there's many words in Scripture to show that some will be saved who are neither regular chapel-goers nor church folk."

"Is Mr. Crouch working on the steamers still?"

Judith asked, after a short silence, for she felt that the subject was not ended.

"Yes, just for occupation; but he is going away soon, Miss Judith-and-and so am I. . . . I wanted to tell you myself, because it's a story that has its ins and outs, and I want you to think I'm doing right. It's a strange thing for an offer of marriage to come my way; and I never gave my mind to any such thing. It pleased the Lord that my poor body should be crooked, and that I should be plain-featured; and when the other young lasses got sweethearts, and were wed, and then had their bairns about them, it seemed natural that I should be left out. Miss Judith dear, when you're trying all you can to comfort a man, and when you see all his kind-heartedness, and when you pray for him night after night, and feel as if his very salvation was in your hands (for I felt sure if I sent Martin away he would sink down again)-somehow, without knowing it, you come to love him more than aught else in the world; and it doesn't matter a bit whether you're twenty or forty, or straight or crooked—a woman's love for a man is the same thing. And I knew it couldn't do him any harm, though I never dreamt that he would have a thought for me, except his old kindness. weeks back he seemed to change, and I thought perhaps it meant that he was getting tired of this quiet life, and wanted to go; and I was very unhappy. . . .

It's been so pleasant! He has come in as regular as the clock; and after supper he has read to me a little from the paper; and on Sundays we've had dinner together. . . . And then he would help me about the house in all sorts of ways, and I couldn't bear to think of him going. I didn't know what it meant. He seemed restless and uneasy, and went more to the reading-room. . . . And then, one evening last week, he was sitting there reading the paper aloud, and I was sewing just as usual, and thinking what a beautiful reader he was, and how happy and homelike it made everything to have him here, when, all of a sudden, he dropped the paper and said, 'Miss Owthwaite,' he said, 'I've been thinking pretty hard of late, and I've made up my mind to tell you what I've been thinking. It's like being adrift for a man to live as a lodger in another person's house. I've been adrift too long. Now, a wife is the best anchor a man can have, if she's a good one; and I want you for my wife, Jane Owthwaite, for you're the best woman I know,' he said."

"Bravo, Martin! He was quite right!" Judith exclaimed, intensely interested. "What did you say? Do tell me!"

"I said nothing just at first, my dear! I was too much taken aback. He went on about not being good enough for me, and that I had been an angel to his little lass and to him, and all that kind of thing.

I daresay you know the way they talk, miss? then he said, that before I answered Yes or No, he must tell me that he had been married before, and that he has a daughter living, but she has disgraced him, and gone off, and he doesn't know where she is. 'And I don't want to see or hear of her again,' he said, 'for she puts a kind of spell on me, and drags me down, and I'm nought but a fool in her hands. Now here's just the difference'—this is what Martin said, Miss Judith—'there's this difference between a good woman and a bad one. You make me feel as if I must strive to be decent, because there's a good God ruling the world, and a man is meant to obey Him. She made me feel that I was no better than a beast, and that other men and women were all the same, and that it didn't matter what a chap did, he would go to the devil in the end. was as beautiful as the day, and my only child,' he said, and he gave a sort of groan, and leaned his head on the table. It was dreadful to see a man take on so, Miss Judith!"

"Poor fellow! And what did you do, Miss Ow-thwaite?" Judith's eyes were full of sympathy.

"Well, Miss Judith, I was sorry for him too, and I said, 'God won't let us be dragged down, if we look to Him for help.' And he said, 'I begin to think He don't want me to go to hell, and that's why He sent me to you. Will you be my wife,

Jane,' he said. 'I'll be a good man to ye.' And I said, 'Thank you, Martin; if you really wish it, I will.' Perhaps I ought not to have said Yes so quickly, Miss Judith"—Miss Owthwaite paused, blushed, and looked into her teacup—"but you see I've had no experience in such matters, and I was grateful to him for caring for me enough to think of such a thing. Men like bonnie faces and nice comely figures, and I had never dreamt of any man ever wanting me for a wife. . . . And he seems so happy and contented in his mind now, and I feel quite different. I can't think what has come over me sometimes."

"I know," Judith said softly. "And I'm so glad, Miss Owthwaite. But will you really go away?"

"Yes, miss. Martin says I'm not to go on 'slaving,' as he calls it,"—the little dressmaker's face was almost beautiful in its pride and happiness, for there is no such beautifier as Happiness—"when I have a husband to keep me. Though indeed, I've enjoyed my work, and been thankful for it many and many an hour. Martin has a nice bit of money that comes in regular, and he wants to take a small farm up on the fells towards Penrith way, where he was born, if we can hear of one. And I was born and bred on a farm, you know, miss, and it's always seemed to be the best kind of life—to be on a bit of land, and to have some dumb creatures to care for,

and to feel that your chief work is to dress the earth and keep it, as God bade Adam and Eve in the beginning. Eh, my dear, the Lord's dealt wonderfully with me! It's amazing for such mercies to be poured upon one so unworthy as I am."

"Dear Miss Owthwaite, no one in the world deserves to be happy, if you do not!"

"But it's come about so strangely! You see I've been an old maid for years now, and had never thought aught about marrying, and such like. I don't deny that at times I felt lonesome, when I thought of living past my work, and no one to mind whether I was well or ill. It's a wonderful feeling, isn't it, miss? to know that there's one living being who cares for you first of all, and would spend his strength to serve you. It puts new life into a woman. I thank the Lord for Martin's love. . . . Only I hope you don't think I said 'Yes' too easily?"

Judith, half crying and half laughing, went to Miss Owthwaite's side and kissed her.

"I think you did quite right, and that Martin is a lucky man. I must run home and tell this piece of news to Mrs. Sylvestre. And, remember, we are going to keep Christmas gaily this year, and you and Mr. Crouch must come and help us. The old folk are to have their beef and plum-pudding at the Hall, after church in the morning, and the children are to come in the evening. We have a magic lantern,

and presents from London, and it is to be quite a special Christmas. Of course the vicar will be with us "—

"Poor Mr. Dale!" the dressmaker broke in, with a sigh and a half reproachful look at Judith's unconscious face. "I hope you will cheer him a bit, now you have come home. I do so wish— But there, it can't be helped, and we haven't the ordering of such things. But oh, Miss Judith, it seems selfish for me to be so happy because I've got all I want for myself!"

"It would be very wicked of you not to be happy," Judith said. "I am sure we were meant to be happy. I never think that happiness is too good to last, but that unhappiness is too bad to last!" and she too sighed, as she turned away. "Good-bye, Miss Owthwaite. I needn't wish you a happy Christmas. You have got it!"

Miss Owthwaite limped to the door with her visitor, and stood to watch the tall lithe figure as Judith sped swiftly along the white road. It was not yet dark, though an hour past sunset, for the slight sprinkling of snow on the ground reflected the light of the sparkling stars, and a large moon was rising above the low line of hills eastward.

All Miss Owthwaite's thoughts were inarticulate prayers; and as she stood glancing upwards at the throbbing stars through a mist of happy tears, words of thanksgiving formed upon her lips. Then she looked once more along the glistening road. Judith had disappeared, but another figure was in sight, coming towards her. A flush flew to Miss Owthwaite's face; she left the door open, and hastened to the kitchen, stirred the fire, lighted the lamp, and listened for the step and voice which had brought a new gladness into her life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

"SOMEONE must have stopped him—or can I have been mistaken?" Miss Owthwaite said to herself, as the moments passed and he did not come. She was about to go and look for him, when she heard him come in. But there was no cheery greeting called out to her, and instead of coming straight to the kitchen, she heard him turn the handle of the seldom-used parlour door, and go in there.

What could it mean? She waited two or three minutes. Something must be the matter... With a tremor at her heart, and an instinctive prayer for strength, she went to him.

The little front parlour was cold and dark; but by the gleam of light from the passage she could see Martin sitting upon the nearest chair, his hands stretched flat upon his knees, his head drooping.

"Martin, what is it?" she said, with a soft touch on his shoulder. "Whatever it is, don't stay here! Come to the light, and let us see one another, dear!" He shook his head. "No, no! The darkness is best. I don't want you to see my face till I've got over the blow a bit. I'm fair shamed for you to see how it's taken the man out of me!" He reached for her hand and held it fast, and when she bent over him and kissed his forehead, he leaned his grizzled head against her breast with a broken sob.

She soothed him, as one soothes a child, with soft words and caresses. "Never mind, Martin! Let me help you to bear it.... Come and tell me all the trouble. There, there! It won't be so bad, maybe, when there's two of us to share it. Why, how cold your hands are! Come to the fire and get warm, my dear!"

He rose heavily and let her lead him into the kitchen, where his chair was drawn up to the fireside.

When the light fell upon his face, her heart sank. "Oh, be quick and tell me!" she gasped. "What is it, Martin?"

He sat down, but kept one arm about her, and she drew a chair close to his side.

"Jane," he said hoarsely, "you're the best woman I know, and I wouldn't hurt you to save my life. Yet I've got to do it. . . . There's something come between me and you, and I can't make you my wife now."

"What is it?" Her lips were white, but she smiled.

"It's just this. My daughter, Sarah, has turned

up, and I can't disgrace you with having aught to do with a woman such as she is. Jane, Jane! you say there's a good God who orders things for the best. I don't want to hurt your feelings—but can you call this the best? Here's a woman who nigh drove me to ruin once, who made a beast of me, insulted me, deceived me—and I thought she'd gone, and I was quit of her, and tried to forget her. And she's my own child; and now she's ill and deserted, and has come back to disgrace me and drag me down again. Good God! if you saw her now, and knew what she was once!"

"Poor creature!" Miss Owthwaite murmured.

"Poor devil!" he said fiercely. "She has brought it on herself, and deserves it. She was proud of her beauty once. Now she's a degraded wretch, thrown off by the brutes who made her what she is; and so she comes to me—this fallen, loathsome thing—and calls me father, and asks me to take pity on her! She'll drive me to drink and the devil again. I feel it now. It was all I could do to get to you sober, and tell you that all must be over between us two. I won't have you disgraced! But why are such things allowed, if there's a God, as you say? Why"—

"Oh, Martin my dear," Miss Owthwaite broke in, "how can I tell why? I know it is so. But I'm only a poor ignorant woman, and how can I tell you why?... Go on and tell me about poor Sarah, your daughter. How did she find you?"

"She found me easily enough, more's the pity. They had my address, at the old place in Liverpool. She had asked for me at the station here, and they told her I was on the steamer; and when we came alongside, she rushed on board. D—n it! the last time I saw her she would scarcely let her skirts touch me. That was when she'd played her trick on Mr. Fielding, and pretended to marry him, and persuaded him to leave little Bessie with me"—

"And but for that, you would never have come here, and I should never have known you," Miss Owthwaite interrupted, stroking his rough hand.

"Yes; you are my good angel, but she's my bad one, and she's got the first claim upon me. And to-day she's been on her knees, kissing and hugging,—calling me her good, dear old daddy,—till I could have struck her dead! I told her she was no child of mine; that she'd left me, and that I'd done with her; that she was a brazen hussy to come near me"—

"Oh, hush, hush! You couldn't say that!"

"I did; and she said it was true, but that she'd no one else to turn to, and was dying, and had come back to be forgiven, and that if I cast her off, she would just drown herself, as lots of 'em do—I don't know rightly what she said, for I was half dazed with anger and shame to see her here. And I don't know how much of her story is true—but it's likely enough. God or no God, there are devils in this world, Jane,

and when a woman goes to the bad, she's in their power, and there's no misery like it . . . She's been thrown off like an old rag by some Honourable gentleman who took her to Paris when she left the other man. Then, poor wretch! she was in a house that took fire, and was badly burnt about the face—her pretty pink and white face—so sweet a little face it was once! My God! I was proud of my pretty little 'un once! . . . Then she was taken to a hospital, and discharged cured last week; but she says she is dying—and she looks like it!"

"Poor soul! poor soul! Where is she now, Martin? Are you sure she is safe now?" Miss Owthwaite's eyes were full of tears. The sight vexed Martin.

"It isn't her that's to be pitied and cried over—
it's you and me! She is safe enough. My lady
knows I'm too soft-hearted to let her die, and she
is comfortable enough at the inn, with a good fire
and her tea. I said she was an old acquaintance of
mine. I couldn't call that draggle-tailed, lost wretch
my daughter! I couldn't bring myself to it. Oh,
Jane, Jane!" he groaned, "am I bound to act as a
father to such"—

"Don't think of her sin," Miss Owthwaite broke in. "Try to think only of her misery and suffering. You are her father; and she knows right well that you will be good to her. She has trusted you, and you cannot fail her, Martin! You must forgive her; you must take care of her now, whatever it costs. You know this, without my telling you!"

"Yes," he muttered. "From the first, angry as I was, I knew what you would say I ought to do. And the more I thought of you, my dear, and of what it would be to let her come between us now, the more I knew that if I cast her off, and let her go and drown herself, I should be making myself less worthy of you. I did think of keeping this to myself, sending her away, and never telling you aught about it; but I couldn't do it, though I tried."

Jane Owthwaite lifted his rough hand to her lips. "Thank God that you could not!" she said.

"But it's bitter hard, my lass!" he went on.

"Just as we were going to be so happy in the new life we've been looking forward to! For I won't make you my wife, and let that woman torment you to death, as she would do. I must just heave anchor, and make off. And after your quiet ways, my dear, it will be harder than ever to bear her devilries. Jane, what must I do? Can't I give her money and send her away? I'd rather work like a slave, and live on bread and water, than have her about me. What must I do? My life is in your hands to turn one way or t'other; and I'll abide by what you say."

"You know what I shall say," Miss Owthwaite answered quickly, "You know that there is only

one right thing to do, and you mean to do it. She is your child. You must shelter her, now she has come back to you. Go and bring her here; she can have your room to-night, and I'll take care of her. I can't bear to think of the poor creature alone."

Martin shook his head. "I can't bring her here. She isn't fit."

"You must, Martin, you must! She might do herself an injury, or she might talk, and say things we wouldn't like to get known in Ernthwaite. To-morrow you can take her away, but to-night she ought to be here. You mean to do right by her, whatever it costs?"

Her voice broke; and Martin put his hand before his eyes. She was the first to recover self-control.

"Go for her," she said. "I'm uneasy about her every minute that she's left. And it's easier to be doing than talking. Go and bring her to me."

They both rose. He took her thin work-worn hands in his and looked into her plain face. It was as an angel's face to him.

"Do you understand what she has been? She isn't fit for you to touch."

A painful flush burned on Miss Owthwaite's cheek, but she kept her eyes on his. "I know. But she is my sister; and oh, Martin, isn't she your daughter too?... Go and bring her."

"God bless you, Jane! And God forgive me for ever doubting Him! There must be a good God, or there couldn't be a woman as good as you."

He kissed her quivering mouth, and went hastily out of the house. And when the door had shut after him, she fell on her knees by the chair he had left, and burst into a passion of weeping.

She was as calm as usual when Martin came back—his miserable daughter with him. She had, in some measure, returned to her old scornful manner with her father. The fear of his anger having no further check upon her, she almost despised him for yielding to her entreaties; and as it was utterly impossible for her to attribute his conduct to its true motives, she fancied that it was due simply to her old fascination over men. The belief restored her self-esteem as nothing else could have done.

She was coolly condescending to Miss Owthwaite, and looked about the little kitchen with an air of patronage which made Martin wild. He told her that Miss Owthwaite was his best friend, and that it was a great kindness on her part to take his daughter in for the night. Sarah looked contemptuously at the cripple, and said nothing. Martin stifled the oath on his lips, told her roughly to be ready to start by the first train in the morning, and went away.

She looked horribly ill, with shrunken, scarred

skin, and dull, bleared eyes. Miss Owthwaite's heart ached for her.

"You look sadly tired," she said.

"Tired? Of course I'm tired! Sick to death of this beastly hole of a world, and everything in it! I'll go to bed, if you'll show me the way."

Miss Owthwaite took her upstairs.

"Thank you," she said, glancing round condescendingly. "It will do for one night. But do, for pity's sake, bring me another candle!"

Miss Owthwaite limped downstairs, and up again. "Is there anything else?" she said, lingering. Sarah had thrown off some of her things, and loosened her hair, and it fell over her white shoulders and arms in a glorious rippling mass. The little dressmaker looked at her visitor with strange feelings of pity and envy. Yes; she must have been wondrously beautiful once! Even now, the turn of the small head, the curve of throat and bosom, were lovely.

Sarah lifted the waves of gleaming hair, and laughed. "Many men have told me that I had the most beautiful hair in the world," she said. "Do you think it a pretty colour? Oh, now, I've shocked you! Well, go away and leave me; and please bring me a cup of tea in the morning. He says we are to leave so early. Men are the most unreasonable creatures. Don't you think so?"

Miss Owthwaite slept little that night, Most of

it she spent on her knees; and the sound of a constant cough from the next room disturbed her when she could have slept. Her face was haggard, in spite of its quiet serenity, when she met Martin the next morning. It was still dark and very cold, but he was determined to take his daughter away by the first train. He could not endure to keep her in Ernthwaite.

"She is very ill, Martin," Miss Owthwaite said, as she poured out a cup of coffee for him. "She will want a deal of care, more than you, or any man, can give. And the first thing you will do must be to get work for yourself at the Docks, or somewhere. You'd be miserable without occupation."

"I shall be miserable anyhow," he said gloomily. "But you're right, as usual, my dear. We'll come to anchor somewhere at that end of London, and I'll have a good chance of getting a berth about the Docks. It'll take all my money to pay someone to look after her, and find her all she wants, I've no doubt. Besides, as you say, I must work to keep the devil in me quiet." He groaned, and put his hand heavily on Miss Owthwaite's shoulder. "I don't seem as if I could think. My one wish is to get her out of this She pollutes it. I saw Mr. Dale last night, Jane, and he says you are right—I must take care of her now." Martin spoke in a tone of despair, and his ruddy face was ashen.

"I've been thinking for you," Miss Owthwaite said.

"Drink your coffee while it's hot, and I'll tell you what I mean to do. I can't bear to think of you and that poor creature without anyone to look after you. So I mean to come and keep house for you, and nurse her—that is, if you'll let me, Martin."

He stared at her stupidly. "You don't know what you're saying, Jane! You come to that big, noisy, dirty London, and set yourself to bear the life that woman would lead you! No, no! You don't know what you are saying, my lass."

"Yes, I do, I do! I know you wouldn't ask me to come, but I've been thinking and praying over it all the night, and I've made up my mind. It would break my heart to think of you left to carry this burden alone, Martin. If we'd been wed before it happened, I'd have had the right to stand by you. And I'm just the same as wed to you, in heart. I don't care whether you make me your wife or not—I must take care of you, Martin, and help you to take care of her."

He still looked at her stolidly, and sipped his coffee mechanically. "I can't let you do it," he said. "You don't know what she is to live with, and I won't make you my wife while I've got a disgrace tacked on to me."

"Well, never mind that.— You must find a little house, about the size of this, near the Docks,

convenient for you, and then I'll bring my furniture and get settled in as quick as I can, and you and Sarah will come and lodge with me. Oh, my dear, you mustn't refuse! I daren't let you be left alone with this trouble—I daren't! The Lord is all powerful, and I know He could give you strength to resist temptation. But I know I could help you, Martin, in my own little way. Don't be so hard on me as to refuse. I couldn't bear it if you did!"

His sternness broke down. He caught her hands and bowed his head upon them. "I believe you'll save me from hell yet," he said.

They heard the bedroom door open. Sarah came down, peevish and cold, and coughing pitifully.

Miss Owthwaite wrapped a warm shawl over her thin shabby-fine jacket before she went out, and in the ready-packed luncheon-basket she put a bottle of cough mixture of her own making.

"Be kind to her, Martin. Be as kind to her as you can," were the dressmaker's parting words.

A fortnight later Miss Owthwaite left her old home. Mr. Dale only, knew why she went away. To herself Miss Owthwaite said that Martin's salvation had been put into her keeping "in the way of Providence," and that it would be shirking a plain and solemn duty to desert him. Perhaps she would have hesitated, had she recognised her own feeling as simply the tender woman-love pining to give help and

sympathy; and that it was, what she would have called "mere human affection," which made her sacrifice sweet and easy.

Martin Crouch found congenial occupation at the Docks, and soon fell into the new routine of life with the ease of a man used to the ways of various sorts of worlds. The brunt of bearing with the impatient and selfish caprices of the invalid fell almost entirely upon Miss Owthwaite. For she was still "Miss Owthwaite." Martin kept to his resolution not to marry her while Sarah lived. He said, with a man's stupid blindness, that he knew it was right to let her be free to go away if the life became intolerable.

Sometimes Miss Owthwaite felt that it was almost intolerable. Sarah treated her with alternate insolence and exacting affection. It was impossible even for her not to be touched by the tenderness of her self-appointed nurse; but as sickness and suffering increased, her irritability increased also, and she seemed to find her only delight in ridiculing Miss Owthwaite's prim ideas and old-maidish manners. Sometimes Martin would overhear her, and harshly call her to order. Then the poor creature would wish herself dead, and declare that if Miss Owthwaite would only let her escape, she would go and drown herself, and rid them both of the burden she knew they hated.

And when Miss Owthwaite's unfailing patience

roused some better feeling, it was shown chiefly in more exacting demands upon her time and attention.

"Don't go away from me! I can't bear to be alone," Sarah said one afternoon, when Miss Owthwaite, thinking she was asleep, had risen, and was quietly creeping out of the room.

"I must go. Mr. Crouch will be in soon, and his tea is not ready."

"Oh, it's always Mr. Crouch! You wait upon him, and study him, and never think how awful it is for me to be left to myself, and my own miserable thoughts. The nights are so long! and then when day comes, and I want a bit of company, you are always too busy to sit and chat."

"But I thought you were tired of talking and wanted to sleep, my dear! I'll come back as soon as I've set things ready for your father." Miss Owthwaite shook up the pillows with deft hand, and the poor invalid's peevish expression melted before the patient smile on the dressmaker's face. She caught Miss Owthwaite's fingers in her hot hand.

"Sleep? No, I don't sleep as I used to when I was young and happy. . . . I'm not so very old yet — but I've had enough of this cruel, horrid world. Oh, Miss Owthwaite, I wish you would give me something to put me to sleep for ever—and without any dreams. I've such horrible dreams

now when I do sleep—it's worse than being awake. I wish I could die!"

"That will be when God wills, dear!"

"Of course I knew you'd say that. Perhaps if I'd known anyone like you sooner, I might have been good too, and believed in God. . . . But I don't know. It's always the plain, humdrum people who are good, isn't it? Pretty girls can't be expected to look solemn, and live like Puritans. And I've had lots of fun in my time. . . . There! you don't like me to say those things, and I won't. I wish I could begin to be good now, so that you and father wouldn't hate me, and want to get rid of me!"

"You know that isn't true. But you don't mean it, poor dear! and when one is ill everything looks wrong and crooked."

"No, I don't mean it," Sarah said, putting Miss Owthwaite's hand against her flushed cheek. "You are an angel to me, and old Daddy is as good as gold—and I've been a wicked girl! But it's all over now, and it's too late to change. . . . Go and get his tea ready; but come back soon. I can't bear you to be away. I don't feel half so bad when your dear prim face is near me, somehow! . . . Oh! and, Miss Owthwaite, you'll finish that new dress for me to-morrow, won't you? There's no need for me to look such a guy even if I am dying! . . .

Don't looked shocked. You are a good old dear, and I don't know what I should do without you—though you can't understand me!"

Martin constantly confessed also that he could not do without her. And so, though sometimes she longed for her quiet little home, and though the strange London ways were a mystery to her, the Methodist dressmaker was happy. For to the average, unreasoning, unemancipated woman, it is sufficient happiness to be where one or two of her fellow-creatures need her.

## CHAPTER XXIX

ONE Sunday afternoon, in the following June, Mr. Smallman entered the garden of Ernthwaite Vicarage with steps even more than usually jaunty. There was a new air of dignity about his dapper person—a new sense of importance in the benevolent glances cast around by his bright little eyes.

A man of property, who is moreover the father of a three days' old son and heir, has a right to wear an aspect of patriarchal philanthropy.

Mr. Smallman had not passed through the gate of the Vicarage since the death of Mr. Fielding. He had not gone many steps beyond the hedge of yew and holly which sheltered the garden from the road, before he stood still, bewildered. Could Mr. Dale be living here? or had he gone away and let his house to strangers?—and odd-looking strangers too!

Sauntering towards him across the lawn came a little group — man, wife, and children — all in

their summer Sunday best. The man was evidently criticising the flowers in the borders, and as he drew nearer, Mr. Smallman recognised his own Several little girls, carrying prayer-books folded in clean pocket-handkerchiefs, and with much befrizzled hair, walked demurely about the paths. Two or three old men sat on a bench in the sunniest corner of the lawn, smoking clay pipes and keeping up a sleepy conversation. Beside the beck, beneath the shade of the oaks and ash trees which screened them from the publicity of the rest of the garden, a young man and a girl strolled side by side, whispering secrets—or listening to those told them by the babbling brook as it hurried from the fells to the far-off sea.

Mr. Smallman grew more and more bewildered. As he drew nearer the house, he heard the sound of music. The door and all the windows were open, and in the front room he could see a white-clad figure seated at a piano which was drawn close to the window. Garden seats near the house were filled with men and women—all silent and listening earnestly as the notes of "Angels, ever bright and fair" floated out in a clear, sweet voice.

Mr. Smallman stood still, strangely abashed, and perplexed as to what he ought to do to keep up his dignity in this queer assembly. Most of the faces were familiar to him, Many of the men were

his own labourers, and touched their hats as he approached. When the music ceased, an old dame in a black crape bonnet and gaily coloured shawl, rose from her place and came towards him with a smile of motherly friendliness, holding out a wrinkled brown hand. "I'm terrible glad to hear about Miss Gladys, God bless her!" she said. "Give her my respex, please, sir, and tell her I'm right glad she's gotten a bairn of her own, and I hope they're both nicely? Why, I remember her being born!"

Mr. Smallman felt more inclined to put half a crown into her palm than his own daintily-gloved hand; but a happy instinct saved him from such an offence. "Thanks, my good woman!" he answered. "Thanks! My wife and son are both doing as well as possible. Can you tell me where the vicar is? He is at home, I hope?"

Someone offered to go and look for Mr. Dale, but when Mr. Smallman heard that he was certainly to be found in the garden, he refused to disturb anyone—especially as the music was beginning again—and went on. The garden stretched up the hillside behind the little house for some distance. Fruit and vegetables, orchard and fowl-run, were mixed together promiscuously. But the result was harmonious, if homely: cabbages are never less uninteresting than when roses grow near them; and

potatoes are none the worse because marigolds spring up at the borders of the patch. Still farther up the hill, at the border of his territory, Mr. Dale had caused to be made a level terrace walk. He had once heard Judith say that no garden was complete without a terrace, whence one ought to be able to look beyond one's own garden, out over the world, and yet be in perfect privacy. He had persuaded Judith to choose the place for his terrace, and it was now, naturally, his favourite haunt. There Mr. Smallman found him, in company with a young railway porter, who was talking eagerly to the vicar.

Mr. Dale was surprised to see his new visitor, and greeted him cordially. "But," he said, "I must ask you to let me have five minutes' talk with Tom Barton. His time is so seldom his own that I don't know when he could come to me again, and he is in a little trouble."

So Mr. Smallman was unceremoniously left to his own devices, while the vicar and the railway porter continued their slow walk up and down the terrace, in close conversation.

Mr. Smallman's first feeling was of offence. His visit to Mr. Dale was an act of condescension, and instead of welcoming him with meek gratitude, the vicar left him, to talk to Tom Barton! Then suddenly he remembered Gladys and her boy, and

he could not feel offended with anyone in the wide world. Such joy and pride swelled his heart that there was no room for paltry personal vexation. He leaned on the low terrace wall, and looked absently across the sunny garden to the fair prospect of woodland and meadow before him. He saw only a sweet girl-face, radiant with the ineffable beauty of mother-hood, bending over a little red atom of humanity which was of quite infinite preciousness to him. How could he care enough about his dignity, to be ruffled even if Mr. Dale forgot the deference due to him?

"Poor Dale!" he said to himself, as he glanced at the vicar's slouching figure, somewhat shabby clothes, and far from handsome features. "Why, I was almost jealous of the fellow once, not so very long ago, and fancied my Gladys cared a good deal for him! Poor fellow! I dare say he means well, though it is a queer freak to throw his garden open to these people on Sundays. I'm not sure if it's quite the thing; even setting aside the sense of equality it encourages. It seems to me a sort of socialism—dangerous to society. But if they like it, and they seem to"—

The vicar's voice broke in upon his reflections. "I am very glad to hear of the happy event at Dingle Hill," he was saying, "and I am very glad to see you at my 'At Home,' Mr. Smallman. It is kind of you to join us."

Tom Barton had gone, and the vicar rested his arms upon the wall beside his unexpected visitor.

"What do you mean by your 'At Home'?" Mr. Smallman said. "Is it a frequent affair? I had no idea of finding you engaged, and called purposely to-day because I thought you would be alone. Are these people invited to your garden?"

"Yes; everyone in the parish is invited. beginning of summer I tell them that I shall be at home every Sunday afternoon. You see it is the only day many of the men and boys are at liberty; and if they want to see me, they know I shall be here. is less formal than making a special call upon me. When it rains, we go indoors, and look at pictures. and so on. They meet one another here; and then this garden and house are a little change from their own homes; and society encourages courtesy, as we all know; and—well, there are many reasons which, I They would not interest think, justify my experiment. It is one of my hobbies, and I shall bore you if I get upon it."

"I—I—perhaps, I do not altogether approve of this sort of indiscriminate mixing of classes," said Mr. Smallman; "but it is very pleasant, I must confess, to see your guests looking so completely at home. If it does not lessen their proper respect for their superiors, it may do no harm. That is what I dread, especially in these days. Is not this kind of

thing encouraging the 'I'm-as-good-as-you' kind of feeling?"

"I think not. Respect will always be shown by decent folk to what, in anyone, deserves respect. For my own part, I am not persuaded that the possession of wealth, or even talents, alone, ought to be Besides, it makes my garden very much pleasanter to me, to share it. I could hardly make up my mind to spend time and money and thought upon it, unless I remembered how my friends enjoy the well-grown flowers and the well-rolled lawn on Sundays. We shall understand the ethics of Possession better by and by, I think. For the world is moving on to happier days, when there will be less snatching, and more sharing." He looked at his "I was afraid the time was flying! watch. served at five o'clock for those who care to remain. Will you come and take a cup with us?"

"Thank you," Mr. Smallman said feebly. He wished he could avoid doing so, yet he was unwilling to be anything but gracious. They hastened towards the house.

"You have music too? I heard someone singing as I passed," Mr. Smallman said.

The vicar's face flushed. "Sometimes Miss Mordaunt plays and sings. I did not know she was here to-day, but she is the soul of our happiness; without her my garden parties would be dull enough. She rarely disappoints us, and her music is a delight!"

Judith and one of the Sunday school teachers, a farmer's daughter, had come to the vicar's "At Home" together; and she had been singing and playing for Annie Robertson sat by the piano, listening an hour. happily. "Please don't stop yet, miss. beautiful!" she said at the end of each song, and Judith went on singing, or playing airs from the oratorios, or simple melodies which she knew her listeners appreciated, Judith was a good deal changed in these last few months. There was less of the old exuberant joy in life, less impetuousness of speech and Sometimes there was a shadow in her clear eyes, and her merry laugh was less frequent. said, when anyone noticed it, that she was growing old and sobering down; and even Mrs. Sylvestre saw no signs of melancholy or bitterness. Instead, to some of those who watched her most jealously, she grew sweeter and more womanly day by day; quicker in sympathy with all sorrow, less harsh in judging of sin.

When Mr. Dale, accompanied by Mr. Smallman, entered the room where she sat, Judith rose quickly, hardly able to hide the surprise with which she recognised her old enemy. He came towards her with a smile. "I am glad to meet you here, Miss Mordaunt. I have come to bury the hatchet. Gladys sent me. You shall be witness. . . . Mr. Dale! Ah! he has gone. He is so busy looking after every-

one. Do you think I can be of any service? What do you do? Take the tea out, or bring the people in?"

"Both," Judith said. "Some of us like to sit down comfortably to our tea, and the dining-room table is laid. Some of us like to stay in the garden, and we hand the tea and bread and butter through the windows."

In fact, while they talked, that part of the proceedings had begun. Annie Robertson was pouring out the tea, while the vicar passed it to his guests.

To his own surprise, Mr. Smallman soon found himself handing bread and butter, with his finest company manners, to a girl who curtseyed and coloured when he said, "Why, is it you, Polly? I did not know you!" though she held his gate open for him every time he drove through.

But he was ill at ease; and after looking into the dining-room, where four old women were cosily settled (Gladys's old friend one of them), he followed Judith into the garden; enticed her into the now deserted parlour, and, having provided her and himself with tea, began to feel more in his element. His self-esteem only returned in a really comfortable degree when he was fairly launched in talk about Gladys and his son.

"Of course, Miss Mordaunt," he said frankly,—"Of course I have come here to-day simply to please Gladys. She has always wished me to be on friendly

terms again with Mr. Dale; and I promised her that if it was a boy, I would come the first Sunday after his birth and make peace. It has been a difficult thing not to be friendly with him, for he really is a good fellow; and even when one disapproves of his whims—this kind of thing, for instance—disapproves on principle, as I do, one can't help acknowledging that he means well."

"I am glad you feel that," Judith said.

"Yes; I felt that all along, even when I was determined to fight him about the foot-path business. Gladys thinks I was wrong about that; so perhaps I was, and at all events I want it to be forgotten now. It is a most extraordinary thing, Miss Mordaunt, but I assure you it is a fact, that since this boy of mine was put into my arms for the first time, I have felt as if I did not wish to have an enemy in the world. It seems a little thing to make such a difference to a man, but upon my word, so long as that boy and his blessed mother are safe and well, nothing else in the world seems worth troubling myself about. As for rights-of-way and private foot-paths, well, I can't understand why I ever made such a trouble of it."

Judith felt more in sympathy with him than she could have believed possible, and smiled. "I am so glad! And now, Mr. Smallman, don't you think you could take down that detestable barbed wire fencing round some of your land? It makes me feel

so bad every time I go through the wood. It is such cruel, wicked, ugly "—

Mr. Smallman interrupted her. "Yes, yes! I know all that; it has made me a little ashamed lately when I have noticed it. It was put up in a fit of temper. Besides, I was thinking, only to-day, that when the boy is running about, it might happen to be in his way, and if he got hurt by the beastly stuff, I should never forgive myself. It shall all be taken down. I will see about it to-morrow,"

"I suppose," Judith said, looking into her teacup thoughtfully,—"I suppose you could hardly lower that dreadfully high wall, which you built about the same time, along the lovely high-road? It is such an eyesore. And then, you know, boys always want to climb walls; and if your boy should have a fall from such a height, it would be serious."

"But it is a very handsome wall, and an excellent piece of masonry, Miss Mordaunt. Do you really think it an eyesore? It never occurred to me before."

Judith shook her head. "It has ruined that bit of the road. The old low wall was beautiful, and everyone could look into the lovely glades of the Dingle Hill woods, and sit and rest under the trees. But tell me more about the baby. Whom is he like?"

Mr. Smallman's eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"They say he is like me. I can hardly say that Perhaps he has my I see the likeness myself. nose"-he stroked the feature reflectively-" and he has Gladys's eyes. At least, I have only seen them wide open once, and then something reminded me of her, and I said, 'The little beggar has your eyes. Gladys!' and she was delighted, and declared that she had said so from the first, but that her mother said the boy was the very image of Dr. Tyson, and he had brown eyes. Mrs. Tyson, I must confess, really is a little foolish about the child. She and Gladys are prejudiced, I daresay, and think him a more remarkable baby than he actually is. But I believe he is not a bad specimen; and you would be surprised -I assure you I was-at the strength of his voice. You must come and see, and judge for yourself. the whole, without partiality, he is a fine boy-a very fine boy. The nurse (she must know a fine baby when she sees one, and is not likely to care more for our child than for another)—I heard her say, when she did not know I was near, 'Isn't he a beauty? Was there ever such a splendid boy?' and so on, using rather exaggerated language, perhaps, but evidently quite in earnest. You must come and see him."

The thought of his son's perfections began to make Mr. Smallman restless; he looked at his watch, and rose to depart. "I don't altogether feel at ease if I

am away from the house," he said apologetically to the vicar, who had been talking to the old folk in the dining-room, but left them to accompany Mr. Smallman and Judith to the gate. "Something might be wanted, and I like to be on the spot." (As a matter of fact, he made the nurse and his mother-in-law very angry by being so much on the spot, poor man!) "And, somehow or other, that small boy already lays hold of my heart-strings; and Gladys likes me to be near. She sent her kindest remembrances to you, Mr. Dale, and bade me say she hoped you would christen the boy for us."

After parting from the vicar, Mr. Smallman and Judith, who was going home, walked on together, the former still talking of the boy. "I shall bring him up as much as possible in the country, and to love the country; and I am not as sure as I once was that a country life ought to mean only sport, and game-preserving, and that sort of thing. I have been thinking over that Allotment Scheme which Mr. Dale gave a lecture about the other night. not there, but I read his lecture; and there was a good deal of common sense in what he said. I am going to ask him, too, to come over and look at my tenants' cottages down at Little Ernthwaite. seems to go in for the question of drainage, and I fancy there is something wrong about them. I want to turn my attention to those matters, because I should like my boy to succeed to a thoroughly well-managed property. Good-bye. You will come soon, and see our little Small man?"

It was a joke of which the proud father never tired, and somehow, neither Judith nor Mrs. Sylvestre, to whom she repeated it, felt inclined to ridicule him. The sacrifice of the barbed wire fencing had indeed so propitiated Judith, that henceforth she and Mr. Smallman were good friends.

She went to see Gladys when permission was given for visitors to approach the shrine of the precious baby. Very sweet and lovely the young mother was; and Judith felt that her question was foolish when she said, "Does it really make you very happy, Gladys—as happy as when you had a new doll or a new dress—to have that wee thing crying till you get him into your arms? You look so pleased!"

Gladys only smiled with the incommunicable satisfaction of a mother, as she held the baby closer to her breast. "I never ask myself now if I am happy. It is absurd. . . . But you are not content, Judith. There's something wrong with you, and I think I know what it is. And I am going to give you a little advice. Don't look vexed! You know I have a right to give unlimited advice now I am a mother."

"Advise away, then! But it is sure to be useless, because there is nothing wrong. Perhaps

I am a little tired with the hot weather—that is all."

"Weather, hot or cold, never used to make any difference to you. Be honest — be your old self! Confess!"

"It is natural that I should sober down, Gladys. I am six months older than you."

"It isn't a bit natural for you to have that look in your eyes, Judith, and I know what it means. You are fretting about Geoffrey Fielding. We heard that you met him in London, and then quarrelled about something."

"Hush!" Judith broke in; "I won't speak of that!"

"I know it hurts, and I am sorry, dear. But I must say what I want to say. That is all over, I suppose?"

" Quite!"

"Then, dear Judith, if you want to get back into your old comfortable, contented frame of mind, marry someone else. I assure you, my dear, it is all nonsense about first love, and that sort of thing! If there is a good, kind man, whom you can respect and trust, and who loves you—marry him! Don't be afraid because you do not adore him passionately. It will all come right—especially when—especially by and by!" She stooped to kiss the little dark head nestled against her breast.

- "But there isn't anyone"-Judith began.
- "You great, foolish, blind bat! You cold-hearted, cruel Judith! When he has loved you ever since he put his foot in the place, and wouldn't look at anyone else because of you! How can you not see it? He would die for love of you, if he wasn't so unselfish, and always thinking of other people, and never of himself."
- "Gladys! what do you mean? You are mistaken. You have no right to say such things! You don't mean"—
- "Yes, of course I do," Gladys said, nodding with grave sagacity. "'Dear Dale,' as father called him, is one of the best men in the world—far too good for you, or for any woman I know; but he has set his heart upon you, and it is horrid and cruel of you to disappoint him. I wish you would think better of it, Judith!"
- "I never thought of it at all," Judith said. "We are very good friends. I am very fond of him, but"—
- "But you don't love him, I suppose. Well, he loves you, and you would make him happy, and he deserves to be happy; and it is wicked of you not to make him happy, when you can, so easily."
  - "How do you know?"
- "How do I know? You silly girl! Everyone knows. Ask Mrs. Sylvestre. Miss Owthwaite told me ages ago that when he was ill he did nothing all

through his delirium but call 'Judith, Judith!' until they thought he was just dying for want of you."

She paused to notice the effect of her words, and when she saw that her listener's eyes were moist with tears, she went on. "Oh, why should one person make another so unhappy? It is no sacrifice for a woman to marry a man who really loves her. makes him happy, and she is sure to be happy herself—by and by. Look at me! You know I married more to please the others than myself; and yet, do you think I have ever regretted it? woman could have a kinder, better husband than I, nor a more precious, darling, sweet, delicious, dear little baby than this—could she, my beauty? just come and look at him now, Judith! seem to know all I am saying? Isn't he pretty? Isn't he really much prettier than most babies—not because he is mine, but really and actually?"

There was no doubt of Gladys's happiness; but Judith knew that she wanted more than a kind husband and a pretty baby to satisfy her. She knew that Gladys had missed that noble and perfect love which is the crown of joy and the chief glory of life—as she had missed it, or rather had thrown it away, when it was within her hands.

Judith knew that she was slowly killing the best part of herself, in her struggle to kill her love for Geoffrey, and to hide from everyone all traces of the

She was not like Gladys—ready to fall back upon the second-best thing possible, because the highest was impossible. Yet she was moved, as a woman is always moved to learn that she is loved. She began, in the new light thus thrown upon things, to remember many circumstances and words which seemed to verify Gladys's theory. And if it were true, then why indeed should she make him suffer? If Mr. Dale could be satisfied with the cold gift of friendship in place of a warm heart's love, then she could easily satisfy him—and why not? Above all, it would put an end to the anguish of self-torment she often endured, when she longed with a sick longing to seek Geoffrey, to throw herself at his feet, and beg his forgiveness for her cruelty. When such a mood came, she hated herself for her harshness to him. When it passed, she hated herself for her weakness. She had been right to despise him. Besides, she had said such terrible things to him as no man could ever pardon! The look he had given her, after her last bitter words of scorn. It was folly to dream that she could haunted her. still be anything to Geoffrey, but a hateful memory. If she should marry Mr. Dale (supposing what Gladys said was true) she would be safe from all these torturing thoughts. He was good, kind, honourable. everything a woman ought to respect. Why could she not love him? Why was all the love of her heart

given to her old boy-friend, with the merry blue eyes and sunny smile—the very sound of whose voice could thrill her to the depths? But he was gone—dead to her, and she to him. If Mr. Dale cared for her, if she could really make him happy by becoming his wife, then why not?

## CHAPTER XXX

A FEW days afterwards Mr. Dale went to Ernthwaite Hall—with great reluctance. A letter from Geoffrey Fielding was in his pocket, and it felt heavy as lead. Yesterday his hope of at last winning Judith had been great. To talk to her of Geoffrey and to show her his letter was the last thing he wanted to do. Geoffrey had written to him several times during the past six months, and Mr. Dale had answered, giving him the poor consolation of knowing that Judith was apparently as well and happy as ever. But he had never spoken again to Judith of Geoffrey.

This letter must be shown to her. Geoffrey wrote to say that he was going out to his new colony, where the first batch of colonists had been since April, and that he thought "St. Peter" ought to have the chance given him of going too.

He had not sent for the boy before, judging it wiser to let him have the benefit of a longer time at Ernthwaite; and as Mrs. Sylvestre had been willing

to keep him in her service, Peter had not even been told that Mr. Fielding's emigration party had sailed "I think," wrote Geoffrey, "that it is without him. only fair to the dear lad to tell him that I am going out again, and that he may come if he likes. Sylvestre promised that he should be at liberty to leave her without notice, if an occasion rose for him to sail, with good prospects. This is the best time of the year for him to face the change of climate, and if he is to go at all, I think he should come with me, on Thursday next. I am sorry to give so short a notice. But the whole thing is sudden; I have been pushed into a corner for time, and had forgotten the boy when I ought to have written. Will you apologise for me to Mrs. Sylvestre, if it gives her any inconvenience; and then put the question before Peter plainly? If he goes out with me, there will be plenty of hard work and rough living. Where he is now he will have easy work and good wages as long as he conducts himself well. Let him choose." There were directions for Peter to meet him in Liverpool, on the landing-stage, the following Thursday, Mr. Dale was asked to should he decide to go. telegraph his decision to Geoffrey as soon as possible.

There was no mention of Judith in the letter; but the way in which Ernthwaite was spoken of, and the hopeless tone in which he touched upon his own life, were pathetic, and, as the vicar well knew, could not be lost upon Judith. Of course, if she still loved Geoffrey, so that the mere mention of his name or sight of his writing could make her waver in her rejection of him, Mr. Dale had no right to seek her love. But it had seemed of late as if she was determined to forget the past. There had been a change in her, and he had meant to speak for himself—not for Geoffrey—at the first opportunity.

Mrs. Sylvestre came to him as he waited in the library. "You know Judith better than to expect to find her indoors on such a day as this," she said. "There she is among the roses. I had a glimpse of her dress, and of Roy's tail."

"I will go to her presently," the vicar said. "Will you read this letter first?"

Mrs. Sylvestre read it, and said, "Poor Geoffrey!" as she held it reflectively in her hand.

"Yes," said Mr. Dale; "that is what we all feel. Yet I must show this letter to Judith. She ought to see it."

"Yes; Peter is her special charge. She will be sorry if he should go. But it is a pity to make her think about Geoffrey just now. She is fast forgetting—indeed I think it only needs the right impulse now, to make her decide as you and I wish. Leave this letter with me, and I will see Peter, and let you know what he decides. Go and find Judith, and get your own answer. She would be much

happier if she had once put an impassable barrier between herself and the past."

Mrs. Sylvestre could not see the vicar's face, as he stood at the window watching the flutter of a white gown among the rose-bushes. She saw his nervous fingers twist themselves together behind his back, and went on calmly: "Geoffrey deserved to lose her, and you deserve to win her. All is fair in love, and you have never been self-assertive enough. It would be cruel to her to show her this letter, and excite her compassion for Geoffrey, now; and very foolish, in your own interest."

Mr. Dale turned, and there was a smile of strange sweetness upon his face. "Sometimes cruelty is kindness, and folly wisdom. Give me the letter, please."

Mrs. Sylvestre sighed, as he strode through the open casement. "That is how the martyrs smiled, I suppose, on their way to the stake,—trying to look as if they liked it. I knew he would not take my advice, but I am sure it would be good for the world if the good people were less unselfish, and sometimes accepted the good things which come in their way, instead of leaving all the prizes for the bad people. I think it might get us on a step if the martyrs lived and were thankful, sometimes—instead of always choosing martyrdom. Dear me! it is all very provoking!"

Meanwhile Jonathan Dale followed the fluttering gown from the rose-garden along a winding path which led at last by a wicket gate into a meadow. Judith had been walking quickly; but when she passed into the meadow, she sauntered, and began to gather flowers. Presently she stood still by the high hedgerow, looking at the strong curving sprays of the wild roses which tossed their wealth of pink blossoms against the summer blue of the sky. wore no hat, and he noticed that the breeze had blown her soft waves of hair into pretty disorder, and that in the sunshine there were threads of gold among the brown. She heard his step, and turned. When she saw who it was, a blush flew to her face, and there was a tremor in the hand she held out.

"Now, God help me!" he said in his heart, hardly daring to meet the sweet eyes which looked with a new shyness into his. For Judith had made up her mind, and thought she knew why he was seeking her.

"Isn't the world—at least our world—quite bewilderingly beautiful at midsummer?" she said, to gain time. "I hardly know what to look at first. The rosy roses, starred upon the blue—or the briars tossing about in such strong, lovely curves, as if they enjoyed life! I wonder if other people delight in it all—as I do. Does it make you feel glad just to look at the roses and the flowery fields, and to smell the sweet scents, and breathe the delicious air? It makes me almost forget that there are such things as misery and ugliness, and great, dreadful cities."

He stood beside her without speaking. There were roses in her hands and in her dress; the scent of roses seemed to be all about her.

"I want you to think of something else than roses and summer, just now," he said, after a pause. "I have had a letter from Geoffrey Fielding. He is to sail again on Thursday, and will be away some months."

"Why do you tell me this? What have I to do with it?" she said, with a swift change of voice.

"I want you to read his letter, and then you will see." He held it in his hand, but she shook her head.

"I do not want to hear his name. I told you never to mention him. Has he dared to ask you to try to rouse my old feeling for him? Has he sent you as his ambassador? It is hardly the part of a gentleman"—

"Hush, hush, until you have read the letter! Your name is not mentioned in it," Mr. Dale interrupted.

Judith sat down on the grassy bank under the hedge; and Mr. Dale watched her face, with the flickering sunlight falling on it through the overarching briars, as she read Geoffrey's letter. He saw the white throat gulp down a rising sob; and

she did not speak as she folded the letter, and gave it back to him.

"Shall we go and look for Peter at once? There is no time to be lost," he said.

Judith nodded, and led the way back to the garden, without speaking for some time. Then she said, "Do you think we ought to advise him to go or to stay? I shall be sorry to lose him."

"He is to choose for himself."

"Oh, I'm afraid there is no doubt which he will choose!"

They found him washing pots in the gardener's shed. The out-door life and good food had borne their usual results, and Peter had grown healthy and hearty. He looked up with a smile, and went on scrubbing the pots vigorously.

"Leave your work for a moment, Peter; Mr. Dale wants to speaks to you," Judith said.

He obeyed, pulling off his cap, and standing ready for orders. She saw that his quick glance had already fallen upon the letter in Mr. Dale's hand, and that an eager flush rushed to his face.

"I think you guess what it is," she said; "you look so pleased."

"Is it about Mr. Fielding, please, miss? Has he sent for me? I've been thinkin' a deal about him; and it's getting near the time he promised to send for me!" The joyous tones pierced her heart.

"Mr. Dale will tell you," she said, and leaned against the door of the shed, arranging her roses, while the vicar read part of Geoffrey's letter, with various explanations, to his eager listener.

"Now, do not decide without thinking seriously over it," he said. "It will concern your whole life. You hear what Mr. Fielding says about roughing it out there; and here you have a good prospect."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, with a beaming smile.

"You had better take half an hour to think it over," Mr. Dale went on.

Peter laughed outright. "No, sir, thank you; it don't want no thinkin' over. You see, if it was goin' back to the old life in Whitechapel, with Mr. Fielding on one side, and the head coachman's place and wages on this side, it wouldn't want no thinkin' over. Wherever Mr. Fielding goes, I'll go, if he will let me; thank you, sir."

The vicar looked at Judith. She dashed her hand across her eyes, and turned to Peter.

"And you care no more than this for leaving us, and the dogs and horses? I thought you were happy here; and yet you are glad to go at a moment's notice."

Peter looked confused. "It's because of Mr. Fielding, please, miss. I should be sorry — I am sorry to go — but" — he broke into a smile of intense

delight—"I can't be sorry when it's to go to Mr. Fielding."

"Very well, it is settled. Go on with your work. I will see you later," Judith said, turning away.

Peter touched his forelock, put on his cap, and set cheerfully to his scrubbing. They heard him whistling merrily before they reached the end of the path.

Judith held out her hand. "Good-bye. I am going up through the wood; the air is stifling in the garden."

"May I come with you?" Mr. Dale said. "I want to talk to you. It is important. Perhaps it will vex you; but I begin to think I ought to have said it sooner, and now I must."

She thought she knew what he wanted to say, and it was not a good moment to choose. He might have seen that. But the sooner it was over the better. She would tell him the truth; and if he wished her to marry him, there would be an end of this horrible weakness, which made her long to be going with Peter—to her bitter shame.

They went up through the wood and came out upon the open hillside, where there was a wide view of the green fields and woods of Ernthwaite, and away to the silvery reaches of the winding lake, and the purple peaks of the mountain range beyond. There was a wooden seat at the edge of the wood, commanding this view. Judith sat down, let her roses fall in her lap, and clasped her hands wearily behind her head.

"I wonder why people will ramble about the world, and are never content to stay at home, however beautiful it may be! Peter is quite glad to go. I never want to go beyond our own dear Ernthwaite again. In the world people get to be wicked and miserable. Peter is wrong to go. We ought to have persuaded him to stay here."

The vicar did not sit down, but stood where he could see her face. She was very pale, but spoke gently, and smiled when he answered, "Peter would have been hard to persuade. Besides, I think he is right. Goodness which can only keep good while it is shielded from temptation, is a poor thing. The strongest characters are formed by meeting and mastering temptation. To have sinned, and to have conquered sin, teaches self-mastery, and self-control better than the innocent life of a child, or the mechanical life of a prisoner."

A glance of suspicion shot from Judith's eyes.

"There are some sins," she said bitterly, "to which only ignoble souls could be tempted. There is a standard of common honesty which all can reach. People who fail to maintain that, are not worth thinking about. I will not ask whether they are better or worse for the fall. They are beneath contempt!"

"Judith, Judith," he said, "you are not honest with yourself! You pride yourself on your truthfulness. You profess to prize truth above all things—have you been true or false to your own heart all these months? true or false to the man who loves you, and whom you love?"

"You have no right to say that!" she cried. "You do not know whether I am weak enough to care a little, still, or not. I do not choose to care for him. I will not care. I am honest!"

"You are not. You are acting a part, and a cruel part—cruel to yourself, and to Geoffrey. I see it clearly now, and I feared it all along. Will you not see it too, before it is too late? I cannot understand how you can be so hard, if you ever loved him. Nay, whether you ever truly loved him or not, I cannot understand how a woman can be unforgiving—dare be unforgiving to any fellow-creature. It is a terrible sin!"

She raised a face full of pain. "Oh! don't you see that it was just because I loved him that I could not forgive him? Anyone else I could have made excuses for. But I had trusted him, and I was humiliated. It lowered me to think I could have loved a man who robbed"—

He stopped her sternly. "Why go back to that? Geoffrey Fielding is a man whose love any woman might be proud to win. He has one of the purest

hearts it has ever been my good fortune to get a glimpse of. He is generous, brave, noble-minded. He has set himself to make reparation for the consequences of his weakness with a sincerity that does him honour. You know what his life has been since he found out what had happened to little Bessie. You know how he has suffered. Yet your hand strikes him the hardest blow. Are there not sorrows enough in life which are inevitable? How can you wilfully add to another's pain?"

"I did not do it to hurt him—it was not as punishment to him I sent him away. You know that. But how could I be the wife of a man who—who— Oh, you know what a horrible thing it was! I think I could have forgiven anything else."

She spoke vehemently, yet he saw that she was yielding.

"Why will you dwell upon that?" he said. "When you look at the sunshine, you don't think of the spots on the sun. You love the good which is in people, and forget the spots. Besides, it seems to me that the pride and harshness you have shown are worse sins than his, because they are deliberate and continued. He fell, tempted, and blinded by passion, and, from the first, not intending to do wrong. You are sinning against the truth of your own heart,"

She had hidden her face in her hands, and he waited. Judith was not a woman who cannot own that she is

"Yes, I know you are right," she said, in a low voice; "I have felt wicked all the time, from the very first. I loved him just the same, but I was ashamed to love him. I knew that if he came. or wrote, I must have withdrawn my decision. But he has never been near me—never written to me all this time! And now, you see, he thinks only of Peter. He does not even mention me to you in this letter. . . . It is too late. I have thrown his love Why did you make me talk about him? Don't you see that it is too late? He could never forgive the horrible things I said to him. You don't know how cruel I was! . . . And he does not even ask after me, in this letter!"

Mr. Dale smiled as he said, "This is childish of you, Judith. A little while ago you were angry because you thought he had written about you. Now you are hurt that he has not. It is you who must take the first step towards reconciliation. You must conquer your pride, and be honest at last."

She gave a deep sigh as she pushed her hair from her brow, and looked up at him anxiously.

"If I do—you really think that even now reconciliation is possible? Do you think he can forgive me? After all I said, and all my unkindness, will he ever respect me, if I say I am sorry? Can he care for me still, do you think?"

"I think so. He is going away. He may never

come back. See him, and ask him if it is too late. Obey your own heart, Judith, and all will be well for you and him—Goodbye. I will leave you to think it over."

There was a strangely tired sound in the vicar's voice as he held out his hand.

Judith suddenly remembered how differently she had expected the conversation to end, and all that Gladys had said. Tears were in her eyes as she looked into his worn, plain face. She had never cared so much for him.

"Mr. Dale," she said, "why did you interfere? Why have you been persuading me to—to—be true to Geoffrey?"

"It was my duty to show you your duty," he said simply. "I ought to have spoken before, but I was afraid of vexing you—and I thought—never mind what I thought. To-day I saw clearly that your happiness was dependent on his—and I want you to be happy."

Mrs. Sylvestre saw him as he passed the house, and went to meet him with an anxious—" Well?"

"My eloquence has been successful for once," he said, with a smile. "Judith owns that she is sorry, and I think she will try to see Geoffrey before he sails. I hope you will not oppose her. Judith's love is not a thing of a day—it is unchanging. And now we who love her shall see her happy once more."

Mrs. Sylvestre went back to the house, shrugging her shoulders. "I really think," she said to herself, more bitterly than was usual with her,—"I really think that the saints are more aggravating than the sinners. It might so easily have been different, if he had managed better!"

## CHAPTER XXXI

GEOFFREY FIELDING was on the Liverpool landing-stage some time before the first tender would take off passengers to his steamer. He partly hoped that Mr. Dale would bring Peter down, and he wanted to have leisure for some talk with him. But there was no face he knew among the bustling throng, and he walked about solitary and sad.

Most of the people who were gathering on the stage, waiting for the Allan Line tender, had friends to see them off, and bid them good cheer. It was probable that everyone left someone behind to regret his or her departure—but himself. It made little difference to a single person in the world whether he was in England or America. Geoffrey did not often indulge in morbid reflections. But there is something in the departure of an ocean-going ship which rouses pathetic The small dramas going on all around could instincts. not fail to intensify his sense of personal isolation.

Here were groups of German or Swedish emigrants,

waiting with the patience which seems the inheritance of the very poor, for the continuance of their long In family groups, journey in search of prosperity. from the old wrinkled grandmother down to the crowing baby, in its close red hood, they sat quietly keeping guard over the pitiful little bundles and packages which contained all their earthly treasures, until they were taken off to the big ship which lav a few yards away out in the river. Here were business men who thought no more of a trip across the "herring-pond" than of ferrying across the river. Here a merry party seeing friends off on a tour of Policemen stood by the gangway of the pleasure. tender, watchful and dignified. Wives clung to husbands, reiterating injunctions to write constantly, and to take care of themselves. Mothers, with grief in every line of brow and lip, yet smiled bravely as their eyes met those of the boy who was leaving home for the first time, and at his own insistence, to seek his fortune; while the boy felt at this moment that he would sacrifice any possible fortune if he might go back to his humdrum home, and stay for ever, "tied to the apron-string" of that dear, precious mother. He would cry himself to sleep, if not too sea-sick, for many a night—that fair-faced boy, who fussed about his luggage, and made a great show of indifference to his friends, lest any chance word should break down his fortitude.

Geoffrey walked in and out of the increasing throng, looking for Peter, and trying not to feel heart-sick. He knew that he had to face a future without Judith Mordaunt—therefore without wife, child, or home. That was his punishment, and it was just. He had many interests in life and ever-widening sympathies and aims; he knew that in time the loss of Judith's love would cease to be a perpetual pain at his heart. He knew that after the sorest battle men can get their gaping wounds healed, given time enough; and can cover the scars up decently, and go through life much like other folk, even when cruelly maimed. Not for one moment had he blamed Judith. sometimes said to himself, "It would not have been Judith if she had been less shocked or had shown it I ought to have known how horrible the story would sound to her. But I had a dim hope that she would be able to see deeper, and know what I am, not only what I have done; and that she loved enough to wash away that stain. Perhaps some day, in another life, she will be able. It is hard to forgive sin—the hardest thing in the world—therefore the divinest."

Geoffrey was glad of the necessity which had arisen for him to visit so soon his infant colony in the far West. The more work he undertook, the better it was for him. But just now it seemed like cutting himself off anew from all hope. The possibility of

seeing Mr. Dale and of getting news direct from Ernthwaite, of hearing Judith's name from one who had been with her lately, had wakened all his slumbering pain. The keen anguish which had made the last winter a horrible memory to him, stirred, and would not be silenced. "Judith, Judith! just to see you once more!" he moaned, as he leaned on the chain and looked down into the brown water tossing against the sides of the stage.

Then once again he paced to the farther end, scanning all faces eagerly. No sign of Peter. Perhaps the lad had changed his mind, and was not coming. It was ten minutes past the time he had mentioned.

Suddenly the sound of a running step behind him, made him turn, and he found himself face to face with Peter—beaming with joy, breathless with haste and joy combined.

Geoffrey threw his arm round the boy's neck, and looked into his happy face. "So you have decided to throw in your lot with me, and take your chance? I'm very glad. I hoped you would come. It is good to see you looking so hearty. Ernthwaite air has made a man of you. Aren't you sorry to leave everybody there?"

"Yes, sir—except to come to you. I can't be as sorry as I've tried to be."

Geoffrey laughed. "Have you come alone? I

thought that perhaps Mr. Dale would come with you. And how did you find me in the crowd?"

"Oh, we both knew you ever so far off, sir! We thought at first we never should, and we meant to wait near the steamer where folk are going on board. And then Miss Judith saw you"—

" Miss Judith?"

"Yes, sir, she is here. She came with me."

Geoffrey startled the boy with his eager "Where? where? Take me to her! Show me where she is! Quick!"

The next moment he was dashing like a madman among the people, towards a tall girl, in plain dark dress, who stood at the edge of the crowd, a little withdrawn. Her face was towards the big ship which floated in mid-stream, and she did not see him until he was at her side.

"Judith!"

She turned, and he caught her hands. "For God's sake tell me why you have come? Not to torment me with wild hopes"—

She interrupted him. Her sweet eyes looked straight into his, though the scarlet blush flew to her face, and her voice trembled.

"I have come to say that I am very sorry I was so cruel—to ask you if you can forgive me? Mr. Dale said I ought to come before you went away. He said that you might never come back, and then—

Oh, Geoffrey, he said he thought you could forgive me, after all!"

They were jostled by the busy crowd. He drew her hand through his arm, and moved quickly away to the end of the landing-stage, where it was quieter. And if any passers-by noticed that he held her close and kissed away her tears, they only smiled, or sighed, according as they saw the comedy or the tragedy of the old, old story.

To the lovers, all the world but themselves was forgotten.

. "Will you really be able to forget my dreadful words?" Judith said. "Will you blot them quite out of your mind, and remember only that I loved you even when I said them?"

"You could not help feeling as you did, dear. But it is an awful thing not to give forgiveness when a fellow-creature asks for it. You could not know that; only those who have sinned as I did can know that human forgiveness is a proof of Divine forgiveness. Now, everything that hurts is past. Our love shall make all the rest of our lives beautiful."

In an incredibly short time came the tender's warning bell. Judith went out with Geoffrey to the steamer, and while Peter, with an air of proud importance, looked after his master's belongings, they stood together, trying to say all that was in their

hearts. A few minutes more, and they were parted. Judith came back in the tender, and the great steamer moved slowly out to sea.

Geoffrey returned in the autumn, and they were married at Ernthwaite the following April. The vicar, of course, married them; and he was one of the heartiest in promoting the festivities which took place on the occasion.

When all was over, the hero of this unheroic story went back to his lonely home, and sat through the long, cold April evening in his study, before his desk. He could not write—he could not think, nor pray. His eyes often rested on the dark yews between his garden and the churchyard, black upon the saffron sky. Low between their sweeping branches gleamed the white cross which marked the graves of Geoffrey's father, and of little Bessie. Perhaps, in his utter weariness of heart, Jonathan Dale wished that he too slept there.

Nevertheless, his life went on as before. He gave hope and courage to many; fought the battle of the oppressed; shared the sorrows and joys of his people, and helped them to bear their burdens. His greatest pleasure was still to go to Ernthwaite Hall, where the beautiful mistress among her books and flowers was ever ready to welcome him. He consulted her about the needs of his flock, discussed new books

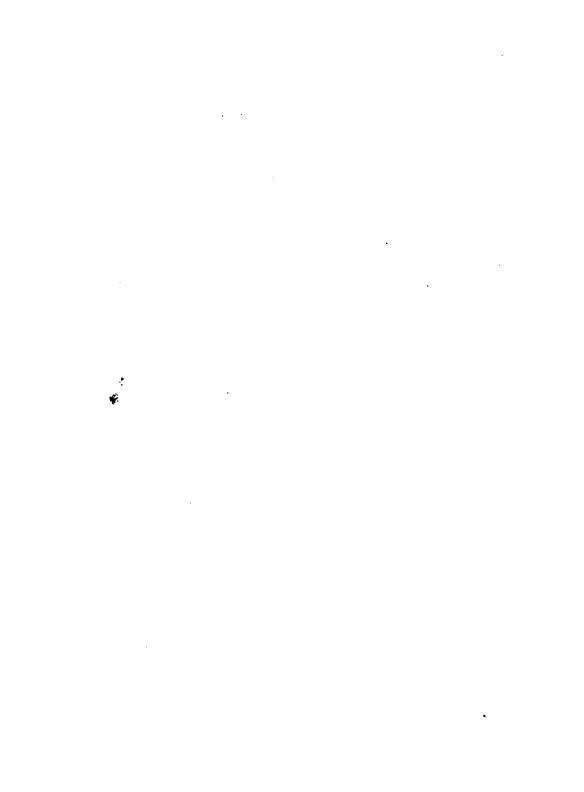
and politics, and heard of all the doings of Geoffrey and Judith.

From time to time he met them there, and the woman he loved became more and more entirely his ideal of wemanhood.

And so, at the end of a long period, which was at the best, passive endurance of pain, he gained the mastery over it. Then the great peace of God passed into his heart, and was with him to the end. And when, in the course of years, he was called to the charge of an important manufacturing town, and became widely known,—when it was the fashion to praise his preaching and read his writings,—Jonathan Dale knew that the secret of his power to move the hearts of others, was his conquest over his own heart on that June day, when he won for another the woman he loved, and lost her for himself.

THE END

MORRISON AND GIBB, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.





| DATE DUE |  |  |          |
|----------|--|--|----------|
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
| ļ        |  |  | <u> </u> |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |
|          |  |  |          |

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004

